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**The Rover Boys in Southern
Waters or The Deserted Steam
Yacht**

Edward Stratemeyer

Imprint

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THE ROVER BOYS IN SOUTHERN WATERS

or

THE DESERTED STEAM YACHT

By Arthur M. Winfield

Chatterton-Peck Company Publishers

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INTRODUCTION

My Dear Boys: "The Rover Boys in Southern Waters" is a complete story in itself but forms the eleventh volume of a line known by the general title of "The Rover Boys Series for Young Americans."

Eleven volumes! Just think of it! What a great number to write about one set of young people and their doings! When I started out, as I have mentioned before, I thought to pen three volumes, possibly four. I was not at all sure that the boys and girls would wish any of them. But no sooner had I given them "The Rover Boys at School" than there was a demand for "The Rover Boys on the Ocean" and then "The Rover Boys in the Jungle," and then, year after year, there followed "The Rover Boys Out West," "On the Great Lakes," "In the Mountains," "On Land and Sea," "In Camp," "On the River," and "On the Plains," where we last met them.

In the present tale the scene is shifted to the lower Mississippi and then the Gulf of Mexico. As before, Sam, Tom, and Dick are introduced, along with a number of their friends, and all have a variety of adventures and not a little fun. While on the Gulf the boys discover a deserted steam yacht, board the craft, and try to ascertain who is the owner, and this leads to a mystery which I leave the pages that follow to unfold.

Once again I take the opportunity to thank the thousands of young folks all over our broad land who have signified their appreciation of my efforts to afford them amusement and at the same time teach a moral. Were it possible I should like nothing better than to write to each and shake everyone by the hand. But that is out of the question, so I can simply pen my thanks, and subscribe myself,

Affectionately and sincerely yours,

ARTHUR M. WINFIELD.

THE ROVER BOYS IN SOUTHERN WATERS

CHAPTER I

THE ROVER BOYS AND THEIR FRIENDS

"The houseboat is gone!"

"Tom, what do you mean?"

"I mean just what I say, Sam. The houseboat is gone—vanished, missing, disappeared, drifted away, stolen!" ejaculated Tom Rover, excitedly.

"Tom, don't go on in such a crazy fashion. Do you mean to say the houseboat isn't where we left it?"

"It is not,—and it is nowhere in sight on the river," returned Tom Rover. "Come, we must tell Dick and the others about this."

"But we left the *Dora* in charge of that big planter last night," insisted the youngest of the Rover boys. "He said he would take good care of the craft."

"Well, he is gone too. I hunted high and low for the houseboat, and for that planter, but without success."

"Maybe the boat drifted away, with the planter on board, Tom. The current has been pretty strong since those heavy rains."

"She was tied up good and tight," answered Tom Rover, his usually merry face wearing a troubled look. "I can't understand it."

"I must say I didn't like that planter's manner much. He looked to be rather a sly one. Come on, let us find Dick and the others at once," went on Sam Rover. "If the houseboat has been stolen we want to know it right away, so we can get on the trail of the thief."

"True for you, Sam." Tom Rover heaved a short sigh. "My! what a lot of troubles we have had since we started on this houseboat trip!"

"Yes—but we have had lots of sport too."

The two brothers were standing near the bank of the broad Mississippi River, just below the town of Shapette, in Louisiana. The party to which they belonged had reached the town on their journey down the Father of Waters the day before, and an hour later the houseboat had been tied up at a bend in the stream and left in charge of a planter who had appeared and volunteered for the task. The planter had given his name as Gasper Pold, and had stated that his plantation lay half a mile inland, on higher ground. He had mentioned several people in Shapette as being his close friends—among others the principal storekeeper—and the boys had thought it all right to get him to look after the houseboat while they paid a visit to a sugar plantation where one of their party had a distant relative living.

To my old readers the Rover boys, Sam, Tom, and Dick, need no special introduction. Sam was the youngest, fun-loving Tom next, and cool-headed and clever Dick the oldest.

When at home the three boys lived with their father, Anderson Rover, and their uncle Randolph and aunt Martha in a pleasant portion of New York State called Valley Brook, near the village of Dexter's Corners. From that home they had gone, as already related in "The Rover Boys at School," to Putnam Hall, an ideal place of learning, where they made many friends and also some enemies.

A term at school had been followed by a brief trip on the Atlantic Ocean, and then a journey to the jungles of Africa, where the lads went in a hunt for their father, who had become lost. Then they had gone west, to establish a family claim to a valuable mine, and afterwards taken two well-deserved outings, one on the Great Lakes and the other in the mountains.

From the mountains the Rover boys had expected to go back to Putnam Hall, but a scarlet fever scare caused a temporary closing of that institution of learning and the lads took a trip to the Pacific coast and were cast away on the ocean, as told of in "The Rover Boys on Land and Sea," the seventh volume of this series. But all

came back safely and returned to the Hall, there to do their duty and have considerable fun, as set forth in "The Rover Boys in Camp."

The boys' uncle, Randolph Rover, had taken an elegant houseboat for debt. This craft was located on the Ohio River, and in a volume called "The Rover Boys on the River," I related how Sam, Tom, and Dick resolved to take a trip on the craft during their summer vacation. On this outing they were accompanied by "Songbird" Powell, a school chum given to the making of doggerel which he persisted in calling poetry, Fred Garrison, who had stood by the Rovers through thick and thin, and Hans Mueller, a German youth who had not yet fully mastered the English language. To make the trip more interesting the boys invited an old friend, Mrs. Stanhope, to accompany them, and also Mrs. Laning, her sister. With Mrs. Stanhope was a daughter Dora, who Dick Rover thought was the best and sweetest girl in the whole world, and with Mrs. Laning were her daughters Grace and Nellie, warm friends of Tom and Sam.

The trip on the houseboat started well enough, but soon came trouble through the underhanded work of Dan Baxter, a big youth who had been the Rovers' bitter enemy ever since they had gone to Putnam Hall, and another boy named Lew Flapp. These young rascals ran off with the houseboat and two of the girls, and it took hard work to regain the craft and come to the girls' rescue. Lew Flapp was made a prisoner and sent east to stand trial for some of his numerous misdeeds, but Dan Baxter escaped.

"We don't want to see any more of Baxter," Sam had said, but this wish was not to be gratified. Floating down the Mississippi, the houseboat got damaged in a big storm, and had to be laid up for repairs. This being so, all on board decided to take a trip inland, and accordingly they set out, the ladies and girls by way of the railroad and the boys on horseback.

As already told in "The Rover Boys on the Plains," this trip was full of mystery and peril. Dan Baxter turned up most unexpectedly, and our friends visited a mysterious ranch only to learn that it was a rendezvous for a band of counterfeiterers. Through a government detective the counterfeiterers were rounded up, only one man, Sack Todd, escaping. Dan Baxter also got away, but later on he was

traced to a big swamp, where his horse was found, stuck fast in the slimy ooze. It was thought by some that Baxter had lost his life trying to find his way through the swamp, but of this the Rovers were somewhat doubtful.

After the capture of the counterfeiters the boys and their chums had gone on to meet the ladies and the girls, and had spent a full week at the ranch of a friend, having the best times possible, horse-back riding, hunting, and helping to round-up cattle. Then the whole party had gone back to the Mississippi, embarked on the *Dora*, as the houseboat was named, and floated down the mighty stream once more.

"This sort of thing is simply grand," Fred Garrison had remarked, as he stood on the forward deck of the craft, yet an hour later he had changed his tune. The houseboat had gone whirling in a bend of the stream, struck a snag and hurled poor Fred overboard. He was hauled up by Sam and Dick Rover, and then it was ascertained that the houseboat was leaking and would have to be laid up again for repairs.

They had stopped at the town of Shapette, a small place, and there they found a carpenter who promised to do what they wanted. When the houseboat was laid up the captain had come to them with a letter.

"My brother in Cairo is dead," said Captain Starr. "I shall have to leave you and look after his children."

The captain was an eccentric individual and the Rovers did not like him much, so they were perfectly willing to let him go. They decided to look around for somebody else to manage the houseboat and in the meantime run the craft themselves.

With the party as cook and general housekeeper was Alexander Pop, a colored man who had once been a waiter at Putnam Hall, but who was now attached to the Rover household. The boys had expected to leave Aleck, as he was called, in charge of the *Dora* while they visited a nearby sugar plantation, but the colored man had begged to be taken along, "jes fo' de change," as he expressed it. As Aleck had remained on the houseboat during the entire time the

boys were on the plains Dick agreed to take him along; and thus, for the time being, the *Dora* had been left in the sole care of the planter.

After the visit to the sugar plantation the party had ridden to Shapette, to do a little shopping before returning to the houseboat. There Tom and Sam had left the others, to make certain that the *Dora* was in proper trim to continue the trip down the Mississippi. On the way Sam stopped at a plantation house to get a drink of water, and when he rejoined his brother it was to learn the dismaying news that the houseboat and the man left in charge of the craft had mysteriously disappeared.

CHAPTER II

ABOUT A MISSING HOUSEBOAT

"Let us go down the river and see if the *Dora* is behind yonder trees," suggested Sam, after he had had time to digest what his brother had said.

"All right, if you say so," answered Tom. "But I feel it in my bones it won't do any good."

The two brothers ran along the wet and slippery bank of the river, which at this point sprawled out into almost a lake. They had to walk around several wet places and were pretty well out of wind by the time they gained the patch of wood the youngest Rover had pointed out. They ran to a point where they could get a clear view of the stream for a full mile.

"Gone — just as I told you," said Tom, laconically.

"Oh, Tom, do you really think that planter stole the houseboat?"

"I don't know what to think, to tell the truth. We have fallen in with all kinds of evil characters since we began this trip."

"Even if we go back to Dick and the others and tell them, what good will it do?"

"I don't really know. But I am going to tell Dick, just as fast as I can."

There seemed really nothing else to do, and with heavy hearts Sam and Tom retraced their steps to where the *Dora* had been tied up, and started to return to town.

"This will certainly worry the ladies and the girls a good deal," observed Sam, as they hurried along. "If the houseboat is gone, we can't continue the trip."

"They won't be worried any more than we are, Sam. It's hard lines all around. If that planter really stole the boat he ought to suffer for it."

"Just what I say."

The brothers soon came in sight of Shapette,—a small settlement where half of the inhabitants were of French extraction. As they reached one of the streets they heard a cheerful whistle.

"That's Dick!" said Sam. "He won't whistle so happily when he learns the news."

"Hullo!" came from Dick Rover, as he caught sight of his brothers. "What brings you back so soon?"

"Thought you were going to stay on the houseboat until we got there," added Fred Garrison, who, with Hans Mueller, accompanied the eldest Rover.

"There is no houseboat to stay on," answered Tom.

"What!"

"The houseboat is gone—and so is that planter who said he'd take care of her."

"Mine cracious me!" burst out Hans Mueller. "You ton't tole me alretty!"

"Tom, you don't mean—" Dick paused.

"The houseboat is gone, clean and clear, Dick."

"And that planter, Gasper Pold—"

"Is gone too," returned Sam. "And so is that carpenter who said he'd repair the craft."

"This is certainly too bad. Tell me the particulars," and Dick's face grew decidedly serious.

"There isn't much to tell," said Tom. "We got there, looked around, made a search, and here we are. No boat in sight, no person to be seen, just nothing and nobody."

"But the houseboat must be somewhere, Tom."

"I agree with you, but not being a second-sight mind reader I can't tell you where."

Alexander Pop, who was with the boys, had listened closely with his eyes rolling in wonder.

"Fo' de Ian' sakes!" he ejaculated. "Dat's de wuss news I's heard in a long time. Seems lak da was no end of troubles fo' dis crowd!"

"Well, if this doesn't beat the Dutch!" murmured Fred Garrison.

"Yah, und it beats der Irish too alretty!" came from Hans Mueller. "Chust ven ve dink der sthars vos shinin' it begins to rain; eh, ain't dot so?"

"You've struck the nail on the head, Hans," answered Sam. "I thought we'd have plain sailing from to-day, and now it looks as if we'd have no sailing at all!"

"Boys," spoke up Dick, sharply, "if that houseboat has been stolen we must get the craft back."

"So say I, Dick," answered Tom. "But how are you going to begin about it?"

"That remains to be seen. Of one thing I am pretty certain—if the houseboat went anywhere it went down the stream. Only a powerful tug or steamboat could pull such a boat up this mighty river."

"That's true—and we must look down the Mississippi for the craft," said Fred.

"Where is Songbird?" asked Tom.

"I left him with the ladies and the girls. They will be along presently, in a carriage," answered Dick.

"There won't be any use of the ladies and girls going down to the river, so long as the *Dora* is missing," said Sam. "They'll have to stay in town, or go back to that sugar plantation, until we learn about the craft."

It was decided that Sam should join the other crowd and acquaint them with the news. He found them at one of the stores, where Mrs. Stanhope was buying some embroidery silk.

"Have you got tired of waiting for us, Sam?" asked Grace Laning, who was the first to see the youngest Rover.

"Oh, I've got bad news, Grace." And then he told the girl of what had occurred, in the midst of which the others came up.

"Missing again!" ejaculated Songbird Powell. "Too bad! What's to be done?"

"We don't know yet."

The ladies were much alarmed and so were the girls. Sam did what he could to quiet their fears, yet he felt unhappy himself.

"I did not like the looks of that planter at all," declared Dora Stanhope. "He had the face of a sneak. I was going to speak to Dick about it, and I am sorry now that I didn't."

"I presume we shall have to remain here until you find the house-boat," came from Mrs. Laning.

"Either here or at the sugar plantation," answered Sam.

"What will you do?"

"I don't know yet – probably go down the river and look for the *Dora*.

She is so large they can't hide her very well."

"Maybe the current of the river carried her away and the planter got scared and left," suggested Songbird. "You'll remember, she broke away once before."

"She couldn't break away – she was tied up good and tight," answered

Sam, decidedly.

"Well, if you cannot find the houseboat, we'll have to go home from here instead of from New Orleans," said Mrs. Stanhope. "That will shorten our trip somewhat but not a great deal. But I hope, for your uncle's sake, that you get his property back."

"We'll do that, or know the reason why," answered Sam.

"What's this trouble about your houseboat?" asked the storekeeper, who had caught part of the conversation.

"It's missing."

"So you said. Too bad!"

"Do you know the planter who had charge of the craft?" went on Sam.

"He was tall and thin and went by the name of Gasper Pold."

"What, did you leave your boat with that man? You should have known better. Didn't you know Pold was an old lottery sharp?"

"We did not."

"Well, he is, and has cheated many a poor white man and nigger out of his hard-earned savings. He's in bad flavor around here, and some of the citizens were just about to ask him to leave or run the risk of tar and feathers."

"Well, he has left, and taken our houseboat with him," said Sam, bitterly. "What about Solly Jackson, the carpenter who was going to do some repairs for us?"

"Oh, Solly's a fairly good kind, but years ago he used to work the lottery ticket game with Pold. He's an old bachelor and never has much to say about anything."

"Has he any regular shop?"

"Oh, no; he's a come-day-go-day sort of fellow, boards around, and like that."

"Then he must be in with Gasper Pold," said the youngest Rover.
"They've cleared out together with our property."

"Hum! Might be so, lad. Have much on board the craft?"

"Yes, a great many things—furniture, a piano, books, and all of our clothing."

"Hum! Quite a haul—if they can get away with it. Maybe you had better notify the authorities."

"We certainly will—if we can't find the houseboat," said Sam, and then, after a few words more with the ladies and the girls, he started off to rejoin Tom and Dick, and Songbird Powell went with him.

CHAPTER III

A FRIEND IN NEED

It was ten o'clock in the morning when the discovery was made that the houseboat was missing, and by the middle of the afternoon the Rover boys and their chums were certain that the craft had been stolen by Gasper Pold and Solly Jackson.

A negro boy who went by the name of Wash—evidently short for Washington—gave them more information than anybody else. This boy, who had been fishing near the woods below Shapette, stated that he had seen the two men go aboard the houseboat early in the morning, accompanied by a young man who was a stranger. The three had cast off the ropes, poled the houseboat far out into the stream, and then drifted out of sight down the mighty Mississippi.

"I thought dat it was werry funny da should be gwine away," said the young darkey. "But I didn't dare to go show myself, fo' I know dat Gasper Pold is a bad aig when he's riled up, yes, sah!"

"You didn't know the young man who went along?" asked Dick.

"No, sah—neber see him afoah, sah."

"How did he look?"

"He looked putty much lak a tramp, yes, sah! He was putty dirty too, he was!"

"Some tramp they got to help them," was Tom's comment. "The question is, Where will they go with the houseboat?"

"I don't think they'll dare to go to any of the big towns," said Dick. "They'll be afraid we'll telegraph ahead to catch them. More than likely they'll land at some out-of-the-way spot and cart our valuables off in a wagon. Then possibly they'll cast the houseboat adrift, or set fire to her."

"If that's the case, what's to do?" questioned Fred Garrison. "I hate to sit still and do nothing."

"Yah! let us go after dem fellers mit pitchforks alretty!" added Hans, vehemently. "Such robbers ought to peen electrocuted mit a rope, ain't dot so?"

"You mean hung, Hans," said Sam. "They certainly ought to be punished."

"Well swing them high, I do declare,
And let them dance on naught but air!
And When they've danced and hour so slick,
We'll cut them down and bury them quick,"

came softly from Songbird, who could not resist the temptation to burst into verse.

"Great shoestrings, Songbird! To think you'd make up poetry on such a subject," cried Fred.

"Couldn't help it—I haven't composed anything to-day," was the calm answer.

"Maype Songpird been komposing boultury ven he been in his coffin," remarked Hans.

"All of which doesn't answer the question, What are we going to do?" said Sam.

"I wonder if I can charter a small tug or steamboat to go down the river after the houseboat," came from Dick.

"There isn't much to be had in the town," answered Fred Garrison. "Still, we can try."

The Rovers with their friends returned to Shapette. Here they ran into the chief of police, who also acted as a sort of detective.

"Boat stolen! Is it possible!" burst out that official. "Never heard of such a thing befo', sah, never! I am sorry, sah, exceedingly sorry, sah! Have you any idea who is guilty, sah?"

"I have," answered Dick, and told what he knew.

"A bad man, sah, that Gasper Pold—ought to have been arrested long ago, sah, yes, sah. But nobody would make a complaint—all afraid of a shooting—very quick man to draw a pistol, yes, sah."

"That's interesting," said Tom. "He'll be a fine man to confront, if we catch up to him."

The chief of police said he would do anything he could, but in the end refused to leave Shapette, and so did nothing. The Rovers soon learned that all he was good for was to talk, and they left him in disgust.

"We must take this trail up ourselves," said Sam. "And the quicker the better."

They walked down to the river front, and after a number of inquiries found out that to charter a tug or small steamboat was just then out of the question, for no craft of that sort was near. But they learned that a young man of the vicinity named Harold Bird, who was the owner of several valuable plantations in that district, owned a new gasoline launch of good size which was housed at a place a mile away.

"I am going to see Harold Bird," said Dick. "Perhaps he'll lend us his launch."

They found out where the young man lived and visited the plantation in a carriage. It was a beautiful place, with an old family mansion surrounded by grounds laid out with exquisite taste.

"Evidently these folks have money," observed Tom.