

THE GO AHEAD BOYS AND THE RACING MOTOR-BOAT



Chapter 2: On the Way

The proposed race, however, did not take place. The graceful Caledonia steadily continued on her way without increasing her speed. There were calls from the deck where the boys noticed several young people standing near the rail. It was plain that there was great admiration on each boat for the beauty and speed of the other. There were calls and cheers, and waving of handkerchiefs to express their feelings. Perhaps it was in part due to this fact that the Black Growler soon began to pull away from the larger boat and not long afterward the Caledonia was left far behind.

“That’s the kind of a boat I’m going to have when I get rich!” said George enthusiastically. “I should like to spend about four months a year on board a craft like that.”

“That’s all right,” spoke up Grant, “but I think after about two months of it you would want something else. You see I know you better than you know yourself.”

“Yes, I see,” retorted George sharply. “You make me think of what Josh Billings said that ‘it’s a good deal better not to know so many things than it is to know so many things that ain’t so!’”

“Never you mind, fellows,” spoke up Fred. “This boat suits me all right. You wait until you see that cup the Black Growler is going to win.”

“I hope we shan’t have to wait too long,” said John dryly.

“You’ll wait until the race comes off,” declared Fred. “I’m not taking any cups before I win them, but when the time comes you wait and see me run away from any boat that tries to keep up with us. I have been on the St. Lawrence before and unless there is something a good deal better than I have ever seen there, we shall simply show our heels to any motor-boats on the river. And they say there are more motor-boats between Clayton and Ogdensburg than anywhere else in America.”

“How many?” inquired John.

“I have been told that there are more than a thousand.”

“Well,” said George, “I’m deeply impressed by the modesty of Peewee. He simply thinks this boat will outclass nine hundred and ninety-nine others that will be madly chasing him all summer long, trying to keep pace with him.”

“But he hasn’t won the cup yet,” said Grant quietly.

“That’s right. That’s right,” spoke up Fred, pretending to be annoyed by the bantering of his friends. “There are always some people that try to take the joy out of life. I heard of an old man the other day who was so disgruntled that when he met a friend on the street who saluted him with a hearty ‘good morning’ this old man looked all over the sky to make

sure he couldn't find a cloud somewhere and say that it wasn't a 'good' morning."

"What did he do if he didn't find any?" laughed George.

"Why he put his hand on his stomach as if he had a pain and shook his head and closed his eyes and groaned out, 'Yes, it's a fine day, but I am sure it is a weather-breeder. We'll have rain to-morrow.'"

"Do you know there are a lot of people like that?" said George. "I met an old woman up near our farm one summer who always said when anybody asked her how she was that she 'enjoyed' poor health. And I guess she did. I never knew any one who took such pride in her aches and pains as she did. One day when the doctor had been to see her she had told him all the pains she suffered and the poor old doctor had to sit there and listen to her for almost an hour. Finally, when he left she started out of the house after him calling to him to come back because she had just thought of another ache that she hadn't told him about."

The boys laughed and silence for a time rested upon the little boat. The Black Growler was moving swiftly and still was attracting attention from every boat she met. Following the channel they kept well out in the river, but the towering hills and the attractive shores were all within sight and manifestly did much to impress the Go Ahead boys.

"Tell me, Fred," spoke up John at last. "Do they have these races on the St. Lawrence every summer?"

"They have had for the past few years and they have had water sports too."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, they have swimming, tilting contests, canoe races, diving and I don't know what all."

"Did you ever go in any of them?" inquired John.

A solemn expression came over Fred's face as he said, "Yes, once."

"What did you go into?"

"I tried to walk the greased pole. There was a silver cup on the end of it and the fellow who could walk out and take it could claim it."

"Did you get the cup?"

"I did not," replied Fred shortly.

"I'm surprised, Peewee. I don't know a fellow in all my acquaintance that I think could walk better on a greased pole than you."

"Huh," muttered Fred. "You ought to have seen me. That pole was a part of a telegraph pole. It stuck out from the dock about fifteen feet. It was covered with grease and the grease had been rubbed in."

"How many times were you allowed to try?" asked George.

"Five."

"And you couldn't go in five trials?"

“I didn’t go. The first time I stepped on the pole my feet flew out from under me and I sat down on the river about six or seven feet below. I sat down hard too.”

“Did you enjoy it?” laughed John.

“I did not,” replied Fred slowly, “but the people on the docks and along the banks seemed to have a fine time.”

“What did you do next?” laughed George.

“I tied some old sacking on my feet and tried to wipe up the grease as I went along. “

“And didn’t that work?”

“Nay, verily it didn’t work. I took my seat that time on the pole and then when I slipped, I tried to throw my arms around it. But for some good reason I didn’t delay very long, before I dropped with a splash into the St. Lawrence.”

“I hope they will have those things this summer,” spoke up John.

“You would be a good one to walk on a greased pole,” said George soberly. “You wouldn’t take much space and if you could once get a footing you could reach forward almost to the end and grab the cup.”

“If I did,” retorted John, “you can rest easy that I wouldn’t let go of it.”

“How soon do we come to West Point?” inquired Grant.

“In about an hour,” answered Fred.

“Do you know, I sometimes think I should like to go there,” said George.

“Couldn’t be done, my son,” spoke up John.

“Why can’t it be done?”

“Because a fellow that enters West Point has to pass an examination.”

“Don’t you think I could pass it?” demanded George as his friends laughed.

“It depends on what it is,” answered John.

“If they would examine you about the old Meeker House and running tin tubes from the kitchen into the front room and a few other things like that maybe you would pass.”

“That’s all right,” spoke up George promptly. “I know something about what a fellow has to do before he passes the West Point examinations anyway and that’s more than some fellows I know can say.”

“What do you know that we don’t?” inquired John.

“How old does a fellow have to be to enter West Point?” demanded George.

“I don’t know,” replied John somewhat foolishly. “I suppose he has to be about eighteen, at least I suppose a fellow eighteen could enter.”

“Could he enter if he was twenty-one?” inquired George.

“He could,” spoke up Grant. “A fellow has to be between seventeen and twenty-two years of age before he can take the preliminary examinations. But there’s another qualification

almost as necessary," he added. "He has got to be free from infirmities."

"No hope for Pop then," said John solemnly. "He has too many infirmities."

"What, for example?" demanded George.

"His appetite is abnormal, his confidence in himself colossal, his willingness to condescend to the level of his superiors is—"

"You're getting all mixed up," interrupted George. "A fellow has to pass a good physical examination and that is all there is to it. Of course if he has too long a tongue or too small a head it might shut him out."

"Of course," assented John. "How does a fellow get a chance to try the examination anyway?"

"He has to be named by his congressman. Most of them, I guess, have a preliminary examination for all the boys that want to enter and then select the one who passes the best examination. But even if he passes, his troubles have only begun, for they make every fellow work his way."

"The government appropriates some money for every cadet, doesn't it?" inquired John.

"Yes," replied George, "\$709.50 per year. That is supposed to cover the necessary expenses. It is not only hard work but the boys don't get but one leave of absence in all the course, and even that isn't given until after the first two years."

"But they have vacations, don't they?" inquired John.

"If you want to call them vacations," laughed Grant. "From about the middle of June to the end of August the cadets go into camp. They are busy every day."

"What does a fellow have to pass an examination in in order to enter West Point?"

"English grammar, English composition, algebra through quadratic equations, plane geometry, descriptive geography, physical geography, United States history and the outlines of general history."

"I think I'll go if that's all," laughed John, who was well known to have troubles with most of his examinations in school.

"Look at that boat over yonder!" suddenly interrupted Fred, pointing to a motor-boat about one hundred feet away. "It looks to me as if it was trying to pass us."

"That's just what it is trying to do," said Grant eagerly.

"Don't you let them do it, Peewee."

"That's just what I intend not to do," said Fred resolutely.

In a moment the speed of the Black Growler was increased, but it was also manifest as the boys glanced behind them that the boat they had noticed was in swift pursuit.