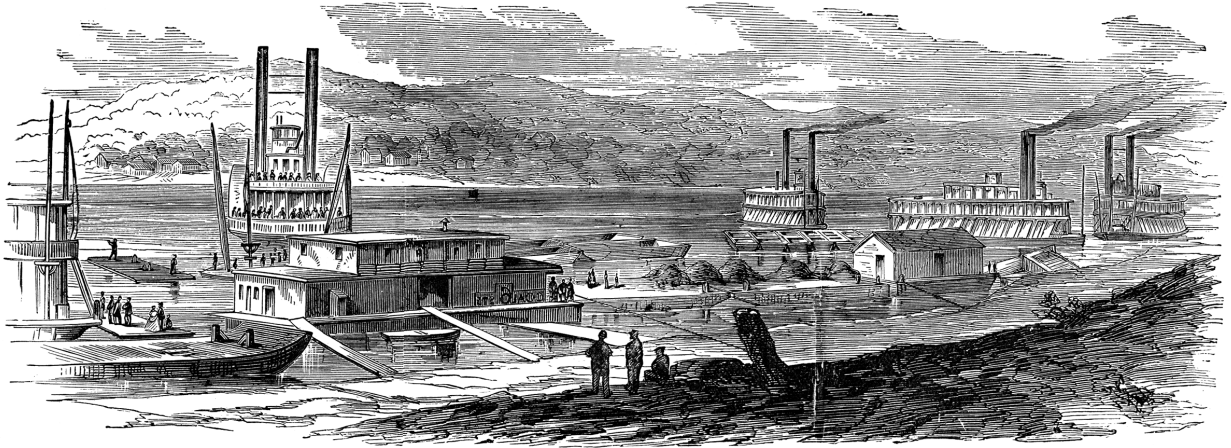


THE GO AHEAD BOYS AND THE RACING MOTOR-BOAT



Chapter 1: The Start



“Here we go!”

“We’re off!”

“Look quick, or we’ll be out of your sight.”

The long, low motor-boat glided smoothly out from the dock to which it had been made fast. Behind it the water boiled as if it had been stirred by some invisible furnace. The graceful lines of the boat, its manifest power and speed, formed a fitting complement to the bright sunshine and clear air which rested over the waters of the Hudson River.

On the dock, which the Black Growler was leaving so rapidly behind her, were assembled various members of the families represented by the four boys on board the motor-boat. Younger brothers and sisters, two uncles, several aunts, not to mention the various fathers and mothers united in a final word of farewell. Handkerchiefs were waved and the sounds of the last faint call came across the intervening waters.

The Black Growler was leaving Yonkers to be gone more than a month. The trip was one to which the Go Ahead boys had looked forward with steadily increasing interest.

In the first place the boat belonged to Fred Button, one of the quartet. Fred now was at the wheel and the expression of pride on his face as he occasionally glanced behind him at his companions was one that indicated something of the feeling in his heart. And indeed there was a substantial basis for Fred’s pride. Among the many boats on the river the Black Growler moved as if she belonged in a class of her own. People on board the cat boats or yachts, and even the passengers on a great passing steamer, all stood looking with manifest interest at the dark-colored little boat which was speeding over the waters almost like a thing alive.

Fred Button, the owner and present pilot of the swift motor-boat was the smallest, or at least the shortest, of the four boys. His age was the same as that of his companions, all of whom were about seventeen. His round body and rounder face were evidences that in time what Fred lacked in length he might provide in breadth. Among his companions he was a great favorite and frequently was called by one of the several nicknames which his comrades had bestowed upon him. Peewee or Pygmy, the latter sometimes shortened to Pyg, were names to which he answered almost as readily as to his Christian name.

His most intimate friend of the four was John Clemens, whose nickname, "String," indicated what his physique was. He was six feet three inches in height, although his weight was not much more than that of the more diminutive Fred. "The long and the short of it" the two boys sometimes were called when they were seen together.

Grant was the one member of the Go Ahead boys who easily led in whatever he attempted. His standing in school was high and his time in the hundred yards dash stood now as a school record. His fund of general information was so large that some years before, in a joke he had been dubbed Socrates. That expressive name, however, had recently been shortened to Soc.

George Washington Sanders, one of the most popular boys in his school, frequently was referred to as Pop, by which designation his friends indirectly expressed their admiration for one who, even if he bore the name of the Father of his Country, was laughingly referred to as the Papa of the Land. This nickname in the course of time had been shortened to Pop.

Already the four Go Ahead boys had had several stirring experiences in their summer vacations. One of these had been spent at Mackinac Island where their adventures had been chiefly concerned with Smugglers' Island. Together they had made a voyage to the West Indies where their experiences on a desert island have been already recorded. Together they had investigated the mysteries connected with an old house near George's country home, a place shunned by the country folk because of its reputation of being haunted. Another delightful summer had been spent by the boys in a camp in the Canadian woods. All these experiences had only prepared the way for the days which now were confronting them.

Every one was confident that the Black Growler would give a good account of herself in the motor-boat races which were to be held on the St. Lawrence River. The grandfather of Fred Button, who was the fortunate owner of an island in the majestic river, had invited the boys to spend a month with him in his cottage. Incidentally he had explained that their visit would be at the time when the boat races occurred, which he had no question they all would greatly enjoy. He was unaware that Mr. Button had already purchased a motor-boat of marvelous speed, although at the time he had no thought that it would be entered in any contest or races.

Yielding to Fred's persuasions at last his father had somewhat reluctantly given his consent for the boat to be entered, as well as for Fred to invite the other three Go Ahead boys to spend the coming weeks together on the island.

All these thoughts were more or less in the minds of the Go Ahead boys when the Black Growler swiftly started on her long voyage.

"Are you going to keep her going like this all the time?" demanded John as the swift little boat steadily continued on her way.

"She doesn't like to slow up," replied Fred glancing behind him as he spoke.

"She had better slow up than blow up," retorted John.

"No danger of that," laughed Fred. "The first thing you know we'll be in the canal."

"I hope not," laughed Grant. "It will be a great day when the Go Ahead boys learn how to use the English language. You don't mean 'in' the canal, you mean 'on' the canal."

"Perhaps he means what my grandfather used to call the 'ragin' canawl,'" suggested Grant.

"Maybe we'll be both IN it and ON it," laughed Fred. "If we should happen to strike a rock or bump into another boat it wouldn't be very hard to understand what would follow."

"That makes me think," said Grant solemnly. "Are you sure that you know how to steer? If we were traveling on the Erie Canal as they used to go soon after it was opened—"

"When was that?" broke in George.

"1825. The Erie Canal extended from Albany to Lake Erie and was constructed chiefly because DeWitt Clinton worked for it with might and main from 1817 to 1825."

"Good for you!" laughed George, "It's pretty hard to trip up old Soc when it comes to figures. Now, I myself happen to know how long the canal is and so I shall be able to tell whether you reeled off your figures, depending upon our ignorance or whether you gave them because you knew what they are. How long is the Erie Canal?" he added slowly.

"Three hundred and fifty and one-half miles, though I find some authorities give it as three hundred and fifty-two miles," laughed Grant.

"Splendid! Splendid!" retorted George solemnly. "I suppose you know all about all the other great canals too."

"I have looked them up," replied Grant simply. "I don't believe in starting off on a trip like ours without finding out some of the facts connected with it."

"Don't ask me! Don't ask me!" protested John quickly. "I haven't been looking them up, so I don't know."

"I didn't say I was going to ask you," retorted Grant. "I told you I was going to inform you. I looked them up for the benefit of my benighted companions. Now there's the Cape

Cod Canal,” he added. “I don’t believe there’s one of you that knows anything about it.”

“If we don’t stop you, there won’t be one of us that doesn’t know ALL about it,” said John, pretending to be discouraged by the attitude of his friend. “I suppose we’ll have to have it,” he added solemnly, “so the sooner we get it out of the way the better. Tell us and have it over with.”

“The Cape Cod Canal,” said Grant as he looked sternly at John, “is eight miles long, it is twenty-five feet deep and one hundred feet wide.”

“My, now I am almost ready to go back home!” said George solemnly. “I cannot imagine finding out anything more important than that. Have you noticed these Palisades we have been passing? Did you ever see anything more beautiful than the river? Pretty soon we’ll come to the Highlands and to West Point and I want to say to you right now, Soc, that I would rather know about these things than I would to hear about a ditch that is one hundred feet wide and twenty-five feet deep and eight miles long. What’s the good of knowing that anyway?”

“I shall try to improve your mind before we come back home,” said Grant, shaking his head.

“You don’t expect to accomplish much in just a month, do you?” interposed George.

“Not much more than to get ready to prepare to begin to start to commence on the contract.”

“My, what a fluent talker my friend is!” said George. “He never is at a loss for a word. It doesn’t make any difference to him whether he knows what it means or not.”

“Never mind your old facts and figures,” spoke up Fred. “I want you to notice that big black yacht yonder. Isn’t she a beauty?”

“She is that,” replied Grant with enthusiasm. “I can almost make out her name,” he added as he looked through the field-glasses. “There it is C-a-l-e-Caledonia,” he added quickly.

“They have got quite a good many people on board,” suggested George as he noticed a group of boys and girls near the rail, who apparently were as deeply interested in the motor-boat as the Go Ahead boys were in the big, black yacht.

“Let’s have a race with her,” suggested George. “Start her up, Fred, and see if the yacht will try to keep up with us.”

Fred laughingly complied with the request, although neither of his companions had any suspicion of the many experiences they were to have with the passengers and crew of the Caledonia before either vessel returned to New York.