

# THE GO AHEAD BOYS AND THE RACING MOTOR-BOAT



## Chapter 3: John Disappears

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The rival boat was distant about one hundred feet, moving in a line nearly parallel with that which the Black Growler was following.

“I believe I have seen that boat before,” muttered Fred. “Can any of you fellows make out the name?”

George hastily took the field-glasses and gazed earnestly at the swiftly moving boat. “I can make out some of the letters, Fred,” he said slowly. “I can see V—a-r, the next letter looks like n.”

“What’s that?” demanded Fred abruptly.

“I can’t make out the whole of it yet,” answered George. “I don’t see what Varn spells anyway.”

“You better look again,” suggested Fred. “I think I know the boat. I guess it’s the Varmint.”

“That’s it,” said George quickly. “Only there’s something right after the word. I can’t just see what that is.”

“Here, let me take those glasses,” said Grant quickly. “I don’t believe you can find anything. Your mother told me that she doesn’t want any better evidence that your clothes are hanging in the right places in the closet than for you to say that you had looked for them and they aren’t there.”

“Listen to the words of our modest friend,” said George as he handed the glasses to his comrade. “Grant is a good boy. The only difficulty with him is he doesn’t realize how good he is.”

“If he doesn’t,” spoke up John, “it isn’t because he doesn’t try.”

“Keep still, fellows,” said Grant, waving his hand at the other Go Ahead boys. “I’m just about to find out what the name of that motor-boat that is beating us—”

“‘Beating’ us nothing!” interrupted Fred. “Can’t you see that she isn’t gaining a foot?”

“I can’t even see her name yet,” said Grant. “You had better slow up a bit, Pygmy. That will give you a good excuse.”

In response, Fred increased the power of the fast moving motor-boat.

“I have it. I have it,” called Grant exultantly a moment later. “It is Varmint II.”

“It is what?” demanded Fred quickly as he glanced behind him for a moment.

“Varmint II, that’s what it is,” said Grant positively. “What do you know about that?”

Fred was silent a moment before he replied. “Two years ago when I was visiting at my grandfather’s I saw the Varmint run away from all the boats in the race. This must be a new

one and if she's swifter than the other one then there will be some race, let me tell you. I'm going to try her out a little now."

In accordance with his words Fred changed the course which the Black Growler was following until he was nearer the rival boat. It was plain now that the crew of the Varmint II were deeply interested in the Black Growler. They were watching her movements and eagerly talking to the man at the wheel.

For several minutes the race continued and then abruptly the Varmint II shut off part of her power and speedily dropped behind.

"I told you what would happen," said Fred exultantly. "I would like to run away from that boat in a race. There isn't a boat on the St. Lawrence I would like better to beat."

"But you don't even know she is going to be on the St. Lawrence or in that race," suggested John.

"That's right. That's right," said Fred dolefully. "There's always somebody taking the joy out of life. You mark my words, that boat is going to the St. Lawrence and we'll find her in the race when we leave the stake."

"I hope so," said Grant. "It will be a great race if she's in it! But honestly, Fred, if you knew a little more about steering a boat I think you could win from her. How would it do for you to get somebody to steer, the day of the race?"

"That's right," spoke up George quickly. "All the Black Growler needs is a pilot."

"That—is—most—certainly true," said John slowly, winking at Grant as he spoke.

"Huh," spoke up Fred. "It's a pity there isn't enough gray matter somewhere in this crowd to spell me at the wheel. I have run all the way from New York and I'm tired and yet there isn't a fellow here who is able to steer this boat."

"Beg your pardon," said John. "Ill steer her with great gladness."

"I don't doubt your 'gladness,'" said Fred. "What I'm afraid of is your ability. If it was Grant now steering and we struck a rock he would never own up that that wasn't the very place he was steering for. However, String, take hold here awhile and give me a rest."

"Where are we going to stop for dinner?" inquired George. "This mad race has brought on an attack of hunger with me."

"That's all right," laughed Fred. "I think the only thing you can say is that you are less hungry some times than others. We can stop anywhere you want."

"Then I say we stop at Poughkeepsie," said Grant.

"Poughkeepsie will do for me all right," said John soberly.

A half-hour later the graceful little motor-boat was lying alongside a dock at Poughkeepsie. Two of the boys had remained on board to guard their possessions while two had gone to a restaurant to purchase a luncheon with which they were to return to the boat.

John and George had volunteered their services for the latter purpose and about fifteen minutes after their departure George was seen returning to the dock, his arms well laden with packages of fruit and sandwiches.

“Where’s String?” Fred asked as his friend stepped on board and deposited his packages.

“I don’t know. I lost him up here.”

“Poor John. Lost in Poughkeepsie. I’m afraid we’ll have to advertise.”

“There’s one thing we won’t do though,” said Grant.

“What’s that?” inquired Fred.

“We shan’t wait for him to come before we begin operations.”

“It does my heart good to hear you speak so truthfully,” said George, as at once he opened the packages and passed the various articles of food which he had obtained.

So busily engaged were the boys that time passed rapidly and a half-hour later George said, “What do you suppose has become of that fellow? I told you that his mother said that he was worse than I am and couldn’t find any of his belongings, but I didn’t know that he would lose himself.”

“Have you ever been in Poughkeepsie?” inquired Grant soberly.

“I have never stopped here.”

“Then I have no need for other explanations. I know what has become of John.”

“Then you’ll be the one to go and get him.”

“I guess not,” laughed Fred.

“No, if he doesn’t show up within fifteen minutes the Black Growler proceeds gracefully on its way and leaves little Johnnie to come after us. Maybe he can work his way by driving mules for a canal boat.”

“There isn’t any canal here,” said Fred.

“Well, we’ll leave it to him to settle the way he will come. We shan’t wait for him.”

“Who’s captain of this ship, anyway?” spoke up Fred.

“That’s the question that has often puzzled me too,” said Grant soberly.

“Well, I am,” said Fred.

“You are? Then let me tell you, Captain Peewee, you will have a mutiny on your hands before you know it. This boat is going on to Albany. We have got to get there to-night and if John doesn’t care enough about going with us he will have to take the consequences. Do you know I think he may have lost his nerve and gone back home.”

“Don’t you believe it,” said Fred sharply. “John will be here in a few minutes. He never will lose his nerve.”

Fifteen minutes however elapsed and still the absent member of the Go Ahead boys

did not return.

When fifteen more minutes had passed, Fred, who had insisted that some investigation should be made and a search for John begun, was overruled by his two companions and in spite of the captain's protests, the Black Growler slipped quickly away from the dock and proceeded steadily on her way up the Hudson.

There were no mishaps although twice Fred stopped to secure fresh supplies of gasoline. No trace of the Varmint II had been seen and if she too was headed for the far away St. Lawrence, there was nothing to indicate the fact. And yet Fred became more positive with the passing minutes that among his rivals in the race in which his own swift motor-boat was already entered, would be found the boat whose pursuit he had found it so difficult to shake off.

The boys by the middle of the afternoon were tired. There was no opportunity for exercise and in spite of the beauty of the region through which they were passing there was a certain monotony in their voyage which at last became wearisome.

The sun was sinking low in the western sky when Fred at last said, "I think we'll make Albany in about an hour."

"Do you think we'll find String there?" inquired George.

"I hope so. If it was any other of the Go Ahead boys I would say we would be sure to find him there, but no one knows what Jack will do. The only certain thing about him is his uncertainty. Don't you remember—"

"I'm telling you," interrupted Grant, "that we'll find John waiting for us at the dock. He knows where we're going to land."

"If String is there I'll agree to pay for the dinner to-night," said George. "My own feeling is that he hasn't left Poughkeepsie yet."

It was still light when at last the Black Growler approached the dock where she was to be tied up for the night. The three Go Ahead boys were peering ahead of them with interest, every one looking among the men on the docks for their missing companion.