

THE GO AHEAD BOYS AND THE RACING MOTOR-BOAT



Chapter 6: In the Tavern

About half-past eight o'clock the Go Ahead boys returned to the dock where the Black Growler had been left. A hasty examination convinced them that all their belongings were safe. In accordance with the suggestion which had been made they soon decided to set forth on their voyage. Just how far they would go was left undecided.

"I hear," said Fred, "that we can stop at a village half-way between here and Rome. They say it is all right. If we don't like to sail in the night then we can stop there, but if we want to we can keep on until we get to Rome or Oneida. That's about as far as we'll want to go anyway."

"I think it will be good fun," said John, "to travel through the country by night. Perhaps we'll find some more places like the old Meeker House."

"I'm afraid," laughed George, "that we'll find our ghosts a little more substantial than they were in that old place."

"I wish we could find my bag," spoke up Grant. "It's strange it didn't come to Utica. I left word with the express office though to send it ahead just as soon as they received it."

"Maybe we'll find the ghost of it," suggested Fred.

Meanwhile they had cast off and the Black Growler was moving noiselessly over the waters of the Erie Canal. They were soon beyond the borders of the attractive city, but after they had passed the first village on their way George said quickly, "Fellows, I believe it's going to rain. Look at those clouds over yonder." As he spoke George pointed to some heavy clouds that could be seen massing in the western sky.

"I don't want to get caught out here in a thunder storm," said John.

"We shan't be," said Fred. "I'll put on a little more speed and we'll go on to the next place. That's where the hotel or tavern is that they told me about in Utica. It won't rain before we get there for it is only four or five miles ahead. If it is going to rain we can stop. If it doesn't we can keep on if we want to."

Conversation ceased as the speed of the swift little boat increased. Less than a half-hour had elapsed when the boys found that they were entering the village to which Fred had referred.

"How about it, Fred?" called John. "It looks pretty black to me."

"It does to me, too," replied Fred. "I think the best thing for us to do will be to stop. We'll find a place where we can leave the motor-boat and then we'll go up to the hotel and if we have to we'll stay there all night."

The boys all agreed to the suggestion and in a brief time the graceful little boat was

covered in such a way that she was protected from the coming storm, which now was almost upon them.

Hastily the boys took their bags and at once started for the hotel which they were informed was only a few yards distant.

With difficulty they made their way along the darkened street, and in a few minutes arrived at their destination.

Just as they entered, the storm broke. There was a long roll of thunder followed by a blinding flash and then the rain began to fall in torrents.

“Just in time, weren’t we?” said Fred with a laugh. “You’re always right if you do what I tell you to. It was my suggestion and I am glad that for once in your lives you had wisdom enough to do what I said.”

“That remains to be seen,” said Grant dryly as he looked about the room in which they found themselves. “It seems to me that the motto over the door of this place ought to be, ‘He who enters here leaves soap behind.’”

“Where did you find that?” laughed George.

“Didn’t you ever hear of the motto over the Bridge of Sighs?”

Whether the boys had ever heard of the famous bridge or not was not manifest, for at that moment in the midst of a deafening peal of thunder the landlady entered the room where the boys were waiting.

“What can I do for you?” she inquired as the thunder ceased.

“We’re caught in the storm and thought perhaps we might stay here all night,” suggested Fred.

“The house is pretty full,” said the woman dubiously. “I don’t know whether I can give you rooms or not.”

At that moment there came a burst of loud laughter from the bar-room. It was plain that many of the men who were employed on the canal also had sought shelter in the little tavern. The house was old, so old that the boards in the floor were warped and the low ceilings gave evidence of the many years that had passed since they had been placed there. Not a door fitted its frame and the windows were all small, the panes being not much more than seven by nine. Whatever was done in one part of the house plainly was likely to be known also in other parts. The noisy men, who were drinking in the bar-room, whose shouts and songs and cries now were even more distinctly heard, could not confine their loud demonstrations to the room in which they had assembled even if they had been so inclined.

“If you don’t mind,” suggested Fred to the landlady, “I think we would like to go up to our rooms.”

“Have you had any supper?” inquired the woman.

“Yes, we got some in Utica,” replied Fred.

“Where are you goin’?”

“We expect to go to the St. Lawrence River.”

“You don’t tell me,” exclaimed the woman. “How be you goin’?”

“We have got a motor-boat.”

“Land sakes! You don’t say so! That’s a terrible long ways and I don’t see how you can get there with a boat all the way.”

“The storm caught us and we thought we had better stop here for the night than try to go on any farther.”

“Where do you come from?” inquired the woman, who busied herself lighting two candles while she was talking.

“We came from Albany this morning,” replied Fred, who did not think it necessary to go more into details concerning their expedition.

“My, you must have come pretty fast. Now, if you’ll follow me I’ll show you to your rooms.”

Fred glanced uneasily behind him as from the bar-room at that moment there came another noisy outburst that was almost alarming in its character.

“How many men are there in there?” inquired Fred, nodding his head toward the room as he spoke.

“It’s about full,” replied the landlady. “A stormy night like this drives a good many of the boatmen and the hands under cover.”

“They are a noisy lot,” suggested Fred.

“They are a tough crowd,” said the woman feelingly. “Sometimes they go off and don’t pay me a cent. That’s one reason why I make everybody pay before I give them a room.”

“Do you mean that we’ll have to pay before we take the room?” inquired John.

“Yes, sir, that’s just what I say. That’s the rule o’ this house.”

“Well, I guess we’ll see the rooms first then,” said George.

Conversation ceased as the woman, who was stout and consequently slow in her movements, led the way up the creaking stairway and then through the hall on the second floor. The floor here also was loose and every step was announced by creakings, while various other sounds were emitted as the boards resumed their accustomed places.

“Here you be,” said the woman at last as she stopped before the rooms at the end of the hall-way.

“We’re directly over the bar-room, aren’t we?” inquired John as another noisy outburst

came from below.

“Yes, but you won’t mind that after a bit,” explained the landlady. “You’ll get used to it same as I have. I go to sleep and don’t pay no more attention to the noises than I do to the wind that blows.”

By this time she had opened the doors, which were unlocked, and entered the rooms.

The boys looked ruefully at one another when they became aware in the dim light of the condition of the rooms to which they had been shown.

“I don’t believe those windows have seen soap and water since the Erie Canal was built,” whispered George to Grant. “When did you say that was?”

“Keep quiet a minute, Pop,” retorted Grant.

The rain was beating against the windows with renewed force. The storm apparently was at its height. For them to go on in the Black Growler was almost impossible. There was nothing to be done, except to make the best of the conditions in which they now found themselves.

Soon after the withdrawal of their landlady, who had been paid in advance for the use of the rooms, although breakfast was not included as the boys explained they might have to leave the village before sunrise, they prepared for bed. They were thoroughly tired by the new experiences of the past day and in spite of their surroundings and the noise of the men below and of the storm, which still was raging, they decided to retire.

Their rooms did not connect and as George and Grant withdrew, Fred said, “If we need your help in the night, fellows, don’t fail to come right away.”

“Are you scared, Peewee?” laughed George.

“Yes, I am, and I don’t mind saying so,” retorted Fred. “I don’t like the sound that comes from that room downstairs.”

Fred’s feelings were not relieved when he found it was impossible to lock the doors. An old fashioned iron latch was the only means by which each door was opened and there were not even bolts or buttons by which the door could be fastened.

“I’m going to put a chair against the door,” said Fred. “I’m afraid something will happen before morning.”

Nor was Fred disappointed, for two hours after the boys were in bed the door of the room which Fred and John occupied was stealthily opened by some one in the hall.