

THE GO AHEAD BOYS AND THE RACING MOTOR-BOAT



Chapter 8: The Coming of the Caledonia

In response to Fred's action there was a loud shout of protest from the men on board. Every one still was manifesting the effect of the drunken spree through which they had passed the preceding night. As yet, however, they had not offered any violence and although Fred's heart was beating rapidly he resolutely stuck to his task and in a brief time the Black Growler darted forward like a thing alive.

For a moment the uninvited passengers apparently were startled by the unexpected action of the young captain. They speedily recovered, however, from their surprise, and one of the men turning to the leader said, "My, ain't she purty, Jim!"

"She is that," replied Jim promptly. "She looks better than she did when I took my last trip to Niag'ra. When I left my house on Fifth Avenoo I didn't think she'd ever measure up to what she was that time, but she is goin' one better. Yes, sir, she's all that you say she is."

Still the men did not interfere with Fred in his management of the motor-boat. Apparently too they did not have any objection to the voyage. Indeed the Go Ahead boys already were aware of the fact that every one of their self-invited guests had brought a small bundle with him. They naturally inferred that these bundles contained most of the earthly possessions of their noisy passengers.

"How is it, Jim!" called another of the men. "Isn't it about time we had breakfast?"

"That's right," spoke up another. "I'm hungry, too. Seems to me I would like one o' them grape fruits."

"Grape fruits? You don't know what they be," retorted Jim.

"You tell us what they be," responded the man, unabashed by the rebuke of the leader.

"Don't you know?" retorted Jim scornfully. "Why grape fruit's the stuff that grows on grape vines."

"Get out!" said the other one. "I guess I know enough about the country to know that grapes grow on grape vines."

"Of course they do," acknowledged Jim, "but this isn't grapes, this is grape FRUIT. It takes a special vine to grow it."

"Does it grow right on the vine?"

"In course it does. What do you think, it grows under the ground like tomatoes?"

“Tomatoes don’t grow under the ground,” spoke up another of the party. “It’s potatoes that grow under the ground.”

“It’s all one,” retorted Jim glibly. “Potatoes and tomatoes. I knew one grew in the air and the other grew in the ground.”

“What about the grape fruits, Jim?” demanded the first speaker.

“Well, they grow on the vines. They are just like big yeller grapes. Many’s a time out on my country estate I have climbed the ladder and picked ‘em from the vines that grow so high they hid the sight of the street from the piazzas of my bungalow.”

“I’m wondering where you got this yacht, Jim,” inquired another.

“Never mind how I got it as long as we have got it. That’s the main thing,” interrupted another one. “What I want to know, is about those grape fruits we’re talking about. How does it taste?”

“Fine. Fine,” answered Jim promptly. Then turning to the boys he inquired, “Have you got anything on board to eat?”

“You see that monemint up yonder,” interrupted another pointing to a tall granite shaft that could be seen in the distance. The entire party including the boys at once looked in the direction indicated and saw a beautiful memorial stone, although few of them were aware of what it commemorated.

“Yes, that’s my granddad’s tombstone,” said one of the tramps.

“I guess he must have been some man,” exclaimed one of his companions. “It’s a pity the rest of the family didn’t take after him.”

“We did, but we didn’t want to hog the whole thing. We had to let some one else have a chance too.”

Meanwhile the Black Growler was speeding swiftly over the waters of the Erie Canal. Fred was driving at high speed and as the boat sped forward he was keenly watching for the coming of a boat that might provide help for the Go Ahead boys in their predicament.

Several canal-boats had been passed, but there was no one on board who appeared to be able to help.

The unwelcome guests still talked noisily to one another, but in the main they ignored the boys and as yet had not offered any violence.

“Who’s running this ‘ere boat, Jim?” suddenly spoke up one of the passengers. “I thought you said this was your yacht.”

“I did say so,” answered Jim promptly. “I’m just taking out a pleasure party. Didn’t you never go to no picnic afore? I want you to be good, for we have got comp’ny on board. When you have got guests you have to be perlite whether you

want to be or not.”

Still the Black Growler was moving swiftly. The waters over which she was passing seethed and boiled as if they had been heated by unseen fires. Even Fred had lost a part of his alarm as he began to suspect that his uninvited passengers did not know how to manage the boat. If they did, it was difficult to understand why they had not yet driven the boys away and taken charge.

There was another thought in Fred’s mind that was perplexing. He suspected that the supply of gasoline was running low. He had neglected to have the tank filled the preceding night, believing that he had a supply ample to carry them forward until they could obtain more. Suppose the motor-boat should stop? What would the men do? They might accuse him of deliberately stopping and in that event he was aware that there might be serious trouble. Indeed, he was still puzzled to understand why the men appeared to be so contented. If they had been workers on the canal, or had been employed by any of the boats why was it that they were free this morning? He was aware that the little city of Rome could not be far away.

If once he should be able to bring the Black Growler safely within the borders of the city he was confident he would be able to rid himself speedily of the men, whose presence with every passing moment was becoming more difficult to bear.

He looked eagerly ahead for signs of the city. He was unable to discover any, however, but his fears increased as he became more positive that his supply of gasoline was low. If only it would last a half-hour longer!

On either side of the canal was a level stretch of country and near to the water no houses were to be seen. His friends had taken seats on the deck forward. In low tones they conversed among themselves, but Fred was too busy in his own task either to heed what they were saying or to join in their conversation.

A few minutes later, after the speed of the boat had materially decreased, Fred said abruptly, “We have got to stop.”

“What for?” demanded the leader, quickly rising as he spoke and turning toward the young pilot.

“Our gasoline is gone.”

“Look here, young fellow,” said the leader of the gang after he had silently glared at Fred a moment, “I don’t want you to try any of your games on us. We’re bad men. Now then, you keep this boat goin’,” he added threateningly.

“I only wish I could do it,” said Fred.

“Are you givin’ us straight goods when you say your gasoline is gone?”

“I am.”

“What are you goin’ to do?”

“Nothing. That’s the trouble. You can’t do anything without gasoline. I am thinking of letting some of my passengers go ahead and get enough to carry us into the town. Do you know how far it is to Rome?”

“Must be about three mile.”

“That wouldn’t be very much of a walk,” said Fred glibly.

For some unexplained reason his courage now had returned and he stood in less fear of his rough and noisy guests.

“What are you goin’ to do?” again demanded the leader.

“There isn’t anything I can do,” retorted Fred sharply, “unless some of you will go ahead and get some gasoline.”

“That’s right, Jim,” spoke up one of his companions. “We’ll go and get his gasoline. Tell him to give us four dollars and we’ll get a good supply.”

“That’s right,” spoke up Jim quickly. “We can’t get gasoline without some money.”

“Oh, one of us will go along and pay the bills,” spoke up John, who up to this point had taken no part in the conversation.

“How much money you got?”

“I guess we have got just enough to buy fifteen gallons of gasoline.”

“All right, then, give it to us and we’ll get the gasoline for you.”

“I told you that we shan’t give you the money,” said John. “We’ll go with you. Perhaps we can get a ride on a canal-boat or something.”

“You won’t save much time that way,” retorted Jim. “The only thing to do is to let us have the money and save yourselves a lot of trouble.”

“We’re not going to give you any money,” said John quietly. “I told you that before. The thing for you to do is to clear out, every one of you if you don’t want to help.”

Unknown to his companions John had been keeping a careful outlook on the canal behind them. In the distance he had seen a yacht approaching that he was confident was the *Caledonia*, which they had passed when first they had set forth on their voyage. He was confident also that the coming of the yacht, together with the number of men that comprised her crew, would be sufficient to overawe the half-dozen men that had forced their company upon the Go Ahead boys.

“Yonder comes the *Caledonia*!” he exclaimed suddenly. “They will give us a lift as soon as they catch up with us.”

Instantly the eyes of every one on board the *Black Growler* were turned toward

the approaching yacht.

Apparently the sight had markedly different effects. The Go Ahead boys were elated, but their passengers after a hasty glance and a few words spoken in low tones to one another, instantly seizing their bundles leaped ashore and ran swiftly toward the road which was not more than fifty yards distant.