

THE GO AHEAD BOYS AND THE RACING MOTOR-BOAT



Chapter 10: In Trouble

The Black Growler was not moving as swiftly as when she had been speeding over the waters of the Erie Canal. There was less need of haste now and the boys were more interested as they were drawing near the city which was to be the destination of their inland voyage.

It was dusk when they arrived at Oswego. They made the little motor-boat safe until the following morning and then with their belongings at once walked to the hotel where they were to pass the night.

A hearty dinner soon revived the spirits of the boys, who were now somewhat wearied by their long voyage from New York.

They visited several places of interest in the little city but at an early hour returned to the hotel and sought their rooms.

The following morning found them soon after an early breakfast once more on board the Black Growler.

They now were about to pass out upon the waters of Lake Ontario. Whatever perils they had experienced from the canal-men were no longer to be faced. If there was danger ahead it would come from the squalls which frequently occurred on Lake Ontario. They were all confident, however, that they would complete the remainder of their voyage successfully and in high spirits prepared to cast off.

“Hi, Peewee!” called George. “Are you sure you have got all the gasoline we need?”

“Yes, sir, I’m sure,” laughed Fred. “That’s one predicament I’m never going to get caught in again. We may have something else go wrong but we’ll not run short of gasoline.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” said Grant soberly. “I noticed from the sounds that came from your room last night that you weren’t sleeping very well again. I didn’t know but you would be so tired this morning that you would forget all about the Black Growler and even the Go Ahead boys.”

“That’s all right,” laughed Fred. “Do I look sleepy this morning?”

“Not especially.”

“Well, I’m not, whether I look so or not,” retorted Fred. “If you are all ready we’ll start.”

“We’re all ready,” answered the Go Ahead boys together and a moment later the Black Growler was speeding on her way toward the waters of the open lake.

“My, what a glorious day this is,” exclaimed John when a little later the motor-boat was fast leaving Oswego behind.

Indeed there was much to cause the young sailors to be enthusiastic over the morning. The clear air, the morning sunlight, the sparkling waters of the beautiful lake all combined to produce an effect that was unlike any which the boys before had experienced. Even the waves appeared to be peaceful. Not a whitecap was in sight.

“Did you hear what that man on the dock said when we passed?” inquired Grant.

“What man?” inquired Fred. “What did he say?”

“Why he said we had better take a man along with us that knows the lake.”

“No, I didn’t hear him,” said Fred. “And if I had, it wouldn’t have made any difference. I know my way all right and you fellows needn’t be afraid that you won’t be down among the Thousand Islands in time for dinner.”

“Where shall we get our luncheon, Fred?” asked George.

“I don’t know yet. It will depend somewhat on where we are. If we can make Cape Vincent all right we’ll have it there.”

An hour later John said after he had looked out over the lake, “The wind is getting fresher. Don’t you notice it, fellows?”

“Yes,” said George. “I hope it will keep it up. I would like to be out here when the Black Growler was rolling a little. I would give a dime to see one of the Go Ahead boys seasick.”

“Don’t be so extravagant,” retorted Fred. “You’ll only have a chance to lose your money before night. The wind is rising,” he added a moment later.

In the distance the boys saw occasional waves that now were capped with white. The Black Growler also had taken on a rolling motion and although all four of the Go Ahead boys declared that they enjoyed the experience it was noticed after a brief time that Fred was strangely quiet. He was still at the wheel and apparently devoting all his thought to his task.

“Say, fellows, will you take a look at Peewee?” demanded George about ten minutes later. “I believe he is getting sick.”

Fred turned and glanced at his companions but did not speak. The color and expression of his face, however, were such as to arouse great elation among his passengers.

“That’s the way, Peewee!” laughed John. “You’ll have to give up your place at the wheel. I’m sorry that we haven’t any doctor on board.”

“There was an old fellow down on Long Island Sound,” suggested George, “who used to tell us that the best cure for seasickness was a sweet apple and if that wasn’t any good then he suggested swallowing a piece of raw salt pork with a string tied to it.”

“What was the string for?” demanded John.

“If you can’t guess, I shan’t tell you,” laughed George. “I’m just making these suggestions for little Pyg’s benefit. He doesn’t look as if he was happy. Hi, Fred!” he added, turning to the pilot, “you had better go back in the stern and lie down.”

“I would,” answered Fred, who was genuinely miserable now, “if there was any one on board who knew enough to take my place.”

“Any one of us can do it,” spoke up George glibly.

Fred shook his head in token of his unbelief as he said slowly, “We would go to the bottom.”

“We may go there anyway,” said John, “if this wind keeps rising. I want you to notice how much higher the waves are and how many more white caps we can see. I don’t know what’s going to become of us.”

The boy spoke seriously and for a moment his companions looked keenly at him.

Sometimes it was difficult to decide just what thoughts were in John’s mind. His manner of speaking did not betray his innermost feelings. This time, however, it was evident that he was anxious, if not alarmed, and when a moment later Fred declared that he was so miserable that he must find some relief, the anxiety of the Go Ahead boys increased greatly.

Fred retired to the cockpit and stretched himself at full length upon the cushions of the seats. A ghastly, greenish pallor was upon his face and no proof was required that he was far from being happy.

John now took the wheel and did his utmost to hold the Black Growler to a steady course.

Occasionally the motor-boat was caught in the trough of the waves and the spray dashed over the boys. It was not long before every one was wet, Fred taking more than his full share of the water. He was, however, so miserable that he did not protest and even his friends now were silent as they devoted their efforts to holding the motor-boat steadily to her course.

All thoughts of luncheon were abandoned. Fred, of course, had passed the stage where the thought of food brought any pleasure, while his companions were so busy that they too had forgotten that midday had arrived.

“You don’t need to mind this too much,” suggested John in his loudest tones. “I have seen the wind come up and then go down just as suddenly as it came. Perhaps that will be the way it will be to-day.”

Whatever the thoughts in the minds of George and Grant were they did not express them. They were standing near the wheel eagerly looking before them.

Each boy was hopeful that a boat might be seen which would come to the aid of the unfortunate Black Growler. Several passing steamers were seen low on the horizon, but it was impossible to attract the attention of any.

“I feel,” said George at last breaking in upon the silence, “that we made a great mistake this morning when we didn’t take the advice of that man in Oswego.”

“What man? What was his advice?” asked Grant.

“Why the one who told us that we ought not to start out on Lake Ontario without taking some man along with us who knew the course and could help us if we got into a fix.”

“I don’t like such remarks at this time,” said Grant. “I never want the man who says ‘I told you so’ to come around to me with his comfort.”

“I didn’t mean it that way,” protested George.

“Of course you didn’t, Pop, but we’re boxed here as sure as you live. There isn’t any use in complaining or in spending our time wishing that we had done something else. Is the wind going down any?”

“Not a bit,” spoke up John. “I think it’s getting stronger if anything.”

Meanwhile the little boat had been rolling and tossing, almost helpless in the trough of the waves. Poor Fred was stretched out at full length on the cushions and the ghastly expression of his face indicated that he at least was not suffering from any fear of the fate which might befall them. He had reached that stage in his sickness wherein he was completely indifferent to his surroundings.

Again and again the anxious boys did their utmost to discover the cause of the trouble. They were unable to find any serious defect with the machinery, however, and their anxiety steadily increased. Several times the motor-boat shipped water and once or twice she was thrown with such violence by the onrushing waves that it did not seem possible she could again right herself.

The boys were now far from land, for only a dim outline of the faraway shore could be seen. They had not taken the direct course to Cape Vincent. Although they might have saved time by doing so, it was considered safer to keep near the shore, although at no place were they within three miles of it.

Another hour elapsed and still the wind continued strong. The sun was shining brightly and the clouds scudding across the face of the sky only occasionally concealed its beams.

The supreme hope in the minds of all had been that their predicament would be discovered and that some one would come to their aid. The shore, however, was so far distant that it was vain to expect help from that direction and on the other hand most of the boats, whose courses were marked by trails of smoke, were so far away that it was almost impossible for them to discern the drifting motor-boat.