

THE GO AHEAD BOYS AND THE RACING MOTOR-BOAT



Chapter 14: A Surprising Passenger

“We haven’t got your bond,” said Fred quickly. He was somewhat uneasy as he was aware when he glanced keenly at the man that he was unusually strong and if he really had obtained possession of the security in a way that was open to suspicion it was quite probable that he would not hesitate to defend what he had taken.

Fred glanced anxiously about the dock to ascertain if help was near in case it should be required.

“Where is it?” demanded the stranger.

“We found it on the boat.”

“Yes, I know you did,” interrupted the man, “but what I want is for you to let me see it or tell me where it is.”

“I tell you we haven’t got it,” said Fred.

“Where is it?”

“It’s where it will be safe until it can be looked up and we find out whose it is.”

“Where did you get that bond?” demanded George, abruptly breaking in upon the conversation.

“Did I say it was mine?” demanded the stranger.

“You asked for it.”

“If I recall, I asked about it.”

“That’s the same thing,” retorted George.

“Not quite,” said the man. “Now then, will you tell me where it is?”

“I don’t think we shall,” spoke up Fred. “If you’ll tell me who owns it and what it was doing on our motor-boat, then perhaps I’ll be willing to talk with you.”

“Then you say you’ll not tell me where it is?” said the man, speaking slowly and looking savagely at Fred as he spoke.

“I shan’t tell you,” said Fred. “Now, if you’re done, we’ll start.”

As he spoke, Fred stepped on board the Black Growler, an action which was speedily followed by his companions. Advancing to the wheel Fred inspected everything to satisfy himself that all things were in readiness for their departure and then said to the man waiting on the dock, “We’ll have to bid you good-by.”

At the same time he turned on the power. As George and John pushed the little boat out from the dock it began to move, but not before the canal-man unbidden suddenly leaped on board.

“Thank you for your very kind invitation,” he said as he seated himself on the

cushions.

“We didn’t ask you to come,” spoke up Fred, “and we don’t want your company. You’ll have to go ashore.”

“Is that so?” laughed the man banteringly.

“Yes, sir, it’s so!” retorted Fred.

“Well, then if I go ashore I think there will be somebody going with me.”

“You’re mistaken,” said Fred. “We’re going down among the Thousand Islands.”

“That doesn’t make any difference to me. I’m going to find out who took that bond. If you don’t tell me where it is then I shall go to a constable or justice and get out a warrant for you. You have owned up that you had the bond on board your boat. It was a stolen bond and I have been trying to run it down for some time. Now I have found it, or at least I have found the party that had it, and you try to bluff me by saying that you won’t tell me where it is. Now, I’ll give you your choice. You can have my company, for I shan’t leave you until I find out more about it, or you can try to put me ashore and I’ll get help. Just as sure as you’re sitting here I’ll swear out a warrant and have you arrested for stealing that bond.”

The boys were inexperienced and for a moment they stared blankly at one another, startled more than they were willing to acknowledge by the bold threat of their unwelcome passenger.

“Well, what is it?” said the man a moment later when no reply had been given to his questions. “Which do you want?”

“The thing for us to do,” said Grant in a low voice to Fred, “is to keep right on. We’ll take this man down to your grandfather’s island and when we get there we’ll tell him all about it. He’ll know best what to do and we’ll wait for his advice before we do anything.”

“That’s all right, Soc,” said Fred, greatly relieved by the words of his friend. Then turning to their passenger he said more boldly than before he had spoken, “I guess we’ll take our chances and have you go with us. We’ll find out more about this later and give you a chance to tell your story.”

“It’s all the same to me,” said the man glibly. “I’ll be glad to have the ride anyway. It’s been a long time since I have been on the St. Lawrence River.”

Apparently Fred’s threat had produced slight effect upon the addition to their party. He spoke as if he were in no fear for himself, while his threat to swear out a warrant for the boys, although it had startled them, had not greatly alarmed any one.

Meanwhile the Black Growler, almost as if she was sharing in the excitement of the boys, was speeding swiftly down the river. The broad expanse of water when she left her dock at Cape Vincent soon was broken by the sight of many islands, some of which were miles in extent while others were tiny little spots, just lifted above the surface of the water.

There was some anxiety on the part of John, that, unfamiliar as they were with the channel, they might strike some hidden rock, but Fred assured his friend that there was slight danger of that in the daytime, as a careful watch was maintained and it was easy for them to follow the course of boats that were in advance of them.

“Look yonder!” said George, suddenly pointing as he spoke to a yacht that was swiftly approaching from the Canadian side of the river.

“Do you know what boat that is?” exclaimed John.

“We ought to know it,” said Fred. “That’s the Varmint II.”

“She beat us down here by a good deal,” suggested George, who was keenly observing the graceful and swift little motor-boat that was steadily approaching.

“I don’t know about that,” retorted Fred. “She may be just coming now.”

“Don’t you believe it,” retorted George. “She has been here a long time and they’re just out testing her on the river. Are you going to try to race with her here?”

“I am not,” retorted Fred promptly. “It will be time enough when we see what she can do in the real race. That won’t be for three weeks yet.”

“How many races do they have down here in the summer?” inquired John.

“I don’t know,” answered Fred. “Two, I guess.”

“One will be enough this summer, I’m thinking,” laughed John. “What are we going to do with that man?” As he spoke John glanced again at the uninvited and unwelcome passenger who apparently was taking his ease on the cushions in the stern of the boat.

“I’m going to do nothing,” said Fred quickly. “I think I will leave him alone until we land at my grandfather’s island and then I will tell him all about it.”

“What do you suppose he is?” inquired John, glancing again at the man, who apparently was unaware of the interest his presence on board the Black Growler had aroused.

“I haven’t any idea.”

“How did he know about that bond?”

“I can’t tell you.”

“Do you suppose he stole it?”

“It doesn’t seem so to me,” said Fred slowly, as he shook his head. “If he stole it I can’t understand why he comes down here after it. You would think he would want to put a long distance between himself and that bond after he lost it.”

“And yet he seemed bold enough when he told us to tell him where it is. What do you suppose made him think of that?”

“Think of what?”

“Why, that we had put it somewhere.”

“It’s the most natural thing in the world,” retorted Fred glibly. “He would know

that fellows like us wouldn't want to keep a bond of that size. I am wondering what it all means."

"First thing you know that man will jump on us all and take the Black Growler away from us. I tell you he's a desperate character. Just look at those hands. If he had his coat off I tell you you would see the muscles of his shoulders stand out like great knots. He's a powerful brute and I don't like his disposition. I wish he was somewhere else."

"I guess he wouldn't attack us," laughed Fred. "We're four to one and even if he's stronger than any one of us he's not as strong as all four of us put together."

"I tell you," said John more positively, "he's a pirate. He's a regular pirate. He stole that bond and tried to take the motor-boat away from us when we were on the canal and I shall feel mighty well satisfied if he doesn't get it away from us now before we go very much farther."

"I confess it's all mighty queer, John, but I don't believe the man will attack us. He has got too many matters just now to look after to try such a fool thing as that."

"But I can't understand why he forces himself on board and why he insists on going with us down the river. I shouldn't be surprised to have him stop us when we are in some quiet place and search the boat. How does he know that the bond isn't here?"

"Because he has searched the Black Growler already," replied Fred. "You may be sure he has gone through every nook and cranny before we came back from the bank."

"I guess you're right," assented John, as once more he glanced apprehensively at the man who was the subject of their conversation.

"I don't know of but one way to get even with him," suggested Fred.

"What's that?"

"Why, to set Soc on him and make him answer questions about canals. I'm telling you that if Grant should ask him about how wide the Suez Canal is or how deep the Sault Ste. Marie is he'd get an answer that would surprise him."

"I haven't any doubt about that," said John somewhat ruefully. "The man is a surprise anyway."

John spoke more truly than he knew. The surprise that was occasioned by the presence of their unbidden guest was mild compared with that which soon followed.