

THE GO AHEAD BOYS AND THE RACING MOTOR-BOAT



Chapter 18: A Test

Early the following morning when the Go Ahead boys went down to the dock, they found that Sam Hodge already had arrived and was busily at work on the Black Growler.

“Good morning, Sam,” called Fred, deeply interested in the sight of the investigation which Sam was making.

“‘Mornin’,” called Sam, without looking up from his task.

“How do you find everything on the boat?”

“I haven’t only seen a few things yet,” retorted Sam. “I’ll tell you later what I think about it.”

“Did you bring along any extra legs or arms?” asked George.

“Nothin’ much,” replied Sam. His manner, however, to the boys seemed to imply that he was holding some information in reserve and this fact at once increased their curiosity.

“What have you got?” asked George.

“I have nothin’ much, but an albuminoid rib.”

“What kind of a rib?”

“That’s what you call it. If it isn’t that it’s alkali.”

“What kind of a rib is an alkali rib?” asked John.

“Why, it’s one of those things that’s about as light as paper. Here, I’ll show it to you,” he added as he drew from his inner pocket a metal rib, which he at once handed to Fred.

“That looks like aluminum to me,” said Fred quickly.

“That’s just what I said,” retorted Sam. “I thought I’d bring it along in case anything happened. I’ll have some feet and hands comin’ later.”

“What for?” laughed Fred.

“What do you s’pose they’re for? They’re for you to wear.”

“If you had brought along a head,” said Grant solemnly, “it might have been a good thing. I have known Fred to lose his several times.”

“We don’t furnish brains, we just use them,” said Sam as he restored the rib to his pocket. “Now, then,” he added, “I’m goin’ to give this here boat an overhaulin’ from stem to stern.”

“There isn’t anything wrong, is there?” inquired Fred anxiously.

“I told you I can’t say yet,” answered Sam. “I don’t know until I have investigated. Can’t expect much when a lot of harem scarem boys are driving such a machine as this is. Had any more trouble since I left you?”

“We haven’t had any,” answered Fred. “We helped pull a couple of girls out of the river

yesterday.”

“What was they doing in the river?” demanded Sam, looking up for the first time since the arrival of the boys.

“What most people usually do when they can’t swim,” answered Fred.

“What was the trouble?” asked Sam.

“The chief trouble was,” said Grant solemnly, “that they did not have any alkali heads. Their heads were made of bone and were solid all the way through.”

“The worst of it is,” broke in Fred, “that they said we were to blame for spilling them into the river.”

“Maybe you were,” said Sam. “One never knows. Maybe they saw you trying to steer this boat.”

“That’s it. That’s it exactly,” spoke up George quickly. “I hadn’t thought before why those girls were spilled out of the canoe. I don’t wonder they wanted to drown themselves when they saw the way Fred steered.”

“That’s all right,” retorted Fred as his friends all laughed. “We’ll take the Growler out this morning and see how she behaves. That’s what Sam wants to do, I know. He can’t tell how she runs until he sees her in action. Besides, my grandfather wants to go up to Cape Vincent and we promised to take those girls along.”

“Better not,” said Sam quickly. “I should think you had had experience enough. Don’t you know that every sailor says that it is bad luck to bring a woman aboard ship?”

“The girls weren’t on board. If they had been there wouldn’t have been any trouble,” asserted Fred.

“Well, go up and get your breakfast,” said Sam, “and by the time you’re ready, I guess we’ll start.”

The Black Growler stopped at the dock of the Stevens’ and after waiting a half-hour Miss Susie and her friend appeared and took their seats on board the motor-boat.

Mr. Button was not enthusiastic in his morning salutations, evidently sharing in Sam’s superstition that ill luck might follow the reception of their visitors.

Apparently the boys were not alarmed, however, and in a brief time the Black Growler sped forward on her way, and the sounds of laughter that came from her occupants were not indicative that trouble of any kind was greatly feared.

“Grandfather,” said Fred, “I would like to try the boat to-day over the course or at least over part of the course that we’ll have to run in that race.”

“Well, if you want to try it,” broke in Sam, who was steering the boat, “why don’t you? There isn’t anything to prevent you that I know.”

“All right then, we will,” said Fred. “We’ll run up to Cape Vincent first and on our way

back we'll try out the course a little. Maybe we'll try only one leg of it—"

"Only one what?" broke in Sam, abruptly looking back at the boys as he spoke.

"Oh, it's not an albuminoid rib, Sam, it's just one leg of the course. They don't have any artificial legs in such places."

"You never can tell what will happen," said Sam; "you'd better bring one along."

"Why don't we try out the leg that we'll have to follow when we go up the river anyway?" inquired John. "Part of the course will be up stream and we might as well try that out now as any time."

"Is she in shape for trying it?" inquired Mr. Button of Sam.

"I haven't tried yet," said Sam cautiously.

"Then you never will know until you try," laughed Mr. Button. "When we strike the beginning let her go for a little while anyway, and we'll see how she works out."

In a brief time the swiftly moving Black Growler arrived near the spot which Fred had been informed would form one of the points in the triangular course over which the race was to take place.

"I guess you have got some friends that want to try out the course too," suggested Sam, pointing as he spoke to a motor-boat apparently of the same size as the Black Growler.

Instantly glancing in the direction indicated by Sam, the Go Ahead boys discovered the Varmint II nearby and from her actions it was plain that she too was planning to test the course.

"Make her show what she can do!" said George eagerly, a demand in which Miss Susie quickly joined.

"That's right," she exclaimed. "I just love to go fast. You can't make the Black Growler move too fast to suit me."

The two boats now were following parallel lines, although they were more than one hundred feet apart. It was manifest also that the crew of the rival boat were aware of the purpose in the minds of the Go Ahead boys and that they also were not unwilling to discover what one of their rivals might be able to do in the coming race.

Conversation ceased as suddenly the Black Growler darted forward almost as if she was a thing alive. The Varmint II started at the same moment and an impromptu race was on.

The bow of the Black Growler at times seemed almost to be lifted above the river. Dashes of water when the bow again struck were driven into the faces of all on board. The spray soon made the cockpit as wet as if a stream of water had been played upon it. The noise of the engine, the splash of the water, the rushing river, the white and excited faces, as well as the anxiety with which the Go Ahead boys watched the speed of their rival, all combined to increase the prevailing excitement. Apparently the two boats were moving

almost neck and neck.

“We don’t seem to gain on her, Sam,” shouted Fred.

Sam turned and glared upon the boy, but did not reply to the suggestion. He was giving his entire attention to the task of steering the boat, glancing occasionally at his rival, which tenaciously was holding to its course.

Several steamboats were passed and as the sight of the racing boats was seen there was a wild rush of the passengers to the rail to watch the contest.

For twenty minutes the unexpected race continued. At the expiration of that time the Varmint II changed her course. Veering to the left she swerved in a wide semi-circle, saluting the Black Growler several times as she turned her course backward.

“I guess that will be some race,” said Miss Susie Stevens. “I think I’ll go with you.”

“You think you’ll what?” demanded Mr. Button sharply.

“I just said that I thought I would be one of the crew of the Black Growler in the race.”

“Excuse me, young lady,” said Mr. Button solemnly. “That will be no place for a lady.”

“Why not?” demanded Miss Susie unabashed.

“All you have to do is to look at yourself now,” retorted Mr. Button somewhat tartly. “You’re soaked, you’re dripping from your head to your heels.”

“I don’t mind a little thing like that.”

“Well, you ought to, whether you do or not. When I was your age the girls didn’t go in for racing.”

“Then they never knew what they lost.”

“No, they didn’t know what they lost,” said Mr. Button quietly. “I guess they were better, if they were not better off.”

“Oh, you’ll enjoy having me about, Mr. Button,” said Miss Susie. “You need all the help you can get and Fred says he’s going to steer in the race. He’ll want me close by to tell him just what to do.”

“If you speak to me while I’m steering the boat in that race,” spoke up Fred, “I’m afraid you’ll find yourself where you and Mildred were yesterday when the Black Growler came along.”

The fearless girl laughed derisively, but as the impromptu contest now was ended, conversation turned to other topics.

The speed under which the Black Growler was moving was somewhat diminished, but the motor-boat still was sweeping swiftly on its course.

“I hope we’ll get there in time for luncheon,” exclaimed Miss Susie at last breaking in upon the silence that had followed her conversation with Fred’s grandfather.

“That’s another thing,” said Mr. Button, “that I don’t approve.”

“What’s that?” inquired Miss Susie. “Luncheon? Doesn’t it make you hungry to ride on the river?”

“When I was young,” said Mr. Button, “the girls didn’t gorge themselves, and many a time I have seen my sisters even at a formal dinner eat only enough to enable them to follow the courses.”

“Yes, and afterwards,” said Miss Susie, who was unterrified by the gloomy remarks of the old gentleman, “they used to go behind the pantry doors and eat pickles and lots of other indigestible things. I don’t wonder that they had such frightful color.”

“But they didn’t have such ‘frightful color,’ as you are pleased to call it,” said Mr. Button. “When they were exposed to the sunlight they wore veils and protected themselves.”

“And afterwards,” said the girl, “they died of consumption. Now, honestly, Mr. Button, didn’t some of these girls that you’re speaking about die when they were young?”

“Death is no respecter of persons. He cuts down the young as well as the old.”

“Do you mean that for an answer to my question?”

The conversation which was becoming slightly heated abruptly ceased when George excitedly called the attention of his companions to a man standing on the dock in Cape Vincent which they were rapidly approaching.

“There’s your bond man,” he said in a low voice.

Instantly the eyes of all were turned toward the individual to whom George had referred. One look was sufficient to convince all the Go Ahead boys that George had spoken truly, and that the man before them was indeed the one who had demanded that the bond which the boys had discovered on board should be given to him.