

THE GO AHEAD BOYS AND THE RACING MOTOR-BOAT



Chapter 21: The Summons in the Night

On each of the three days that followed, the Black Growler was sent over a part of the course which had been mapped out for the race. The speed of the marvelous little motor-boat apparently was satisfactory to all concerned, except Sam. He growled and protested that there was something wrong with the boat and declared that unless they kept a careful watch, other things that would be still worse might occur.

On several occasions an impromptu race was had with the Varmint II. It was plain to the occupants of each boat that their rival was dangerous. Fred became more anxious with the passing days, sometimes being low spirited and declaring that there was no hope for the Black Growler.

He was easily routed out of his despondency, however, for it has been well said that it is not difficult for men to believe the things which they wish to believe.

“We’ll be all right,” said George confidently. “There wouldn’t be any fun in a race if the other boat did not have some speed in her. But you just wait, Fred, and we’ll show that Varmint II a clean pair of heels.”

“I hope so,” said Fred, his courage quickly rising again.

“By the way, Fred,” said John, “you never told us any more about that man who came for the bond.”

“I haven’t any more to tell,” said Fred quietly.

“Now look here, Peewee,” spoke up Grant. “That bond wasn’t yours. It belonged to the Go Ahead boys. I don’t see why you assume all the rights of ownership.”

“I don’t,” protested Fred. “The bond was registered in my name at the bank and so I had to go with my grandfather to see about it.”

“Did that canal-man steal the bond?” asked John.

“I can’t tell you,” replied Fred.

“Do you mean you can’t, or you won’t tell?”

“A little of both,” laughed Fred, eager to change the subject.

Throughout these conversations Sam Hodge seldom spoke. Indeed, as the time drew nearer the day of the race, his anxiety manifestly increased. He was busy on or about the boat throughout the day and even when night fell it was difficult to persuade him to retire to his room in the boat-house.

Once when Fred looked out of his bedroom window, in the moonlight night about twelve o’clock, he discovered Sam pacing back and forth on the dock. Just why he was so uneasy Fred did not understand and Sam did not offer any explanation.

On the following night not long after the boys had retired, they were awakened by a loud call from Sam Hodge.

“Hi! Hi there!” he shouted. “Come out here.”

Hastily donning their clothing the boys ran out of the house and quickly joined Sam, who had leaped into a skiff that had been fastened to the dock and was now rowing swiftly toward the head of the island.

“What is it, Sam?” called Fred.

Sam, however, made no response and soon disappeared from sight around the bend in the shore.

“What do you suppose the trouble is?” inquired John.

“I’m telling you,” said George, “that Sam has seen something that surprised him. He has been saying all the while that he was afraid something might happen to the Black Growler.”

“But nothing can happen to her to-night. It’s perfectly clear. There’s no storm, and even Sam did not think it was worth while to run her into the boat-house.”

“That may be just the trouble,” suggested Grant.

“I don’t know what you mean,” retorted George, quickly turning upon his friend. “What might happen?”

“The thing that Sam seemed to be afraid of.”

“But what is that?”

“Sam hasn’t told me.”

“That’s all so,” spoke up Fred, “but Sam has some reason for being worried. I don’t know what it is, and I think he ought to tell us.”

“Maybe he will when he comes back,” suggested George.

“Back from where?” retorted John scornfully. “He’s just started, and nobody knows where he is going or when he is coming back.”

“He will be here within a few minutes,” said Grant confidently.

True to Grant’s suggestion, not many minutes had elapsed before Sam was seen approaching. He was rowing leisurely and apparently was neither alarmed nor excited.

As soon as he came within speaking distance, Fred called sharply, “What is it, Sam?”

“Did you see anything?” inquired Sam as he rested on his oars a few yards from the dock.

“Nothing, except you,” answered Fred. “We saw you pulling as if your life depended upon it.”

“It wasn’t my life, exactly,” said Sam slowly, “but there was a man here on the dock.”

“A man?” exclaimed George. “Who was he? What was he doing here?”

“That’s exactly what I should like to know myself,” said Sam shortly. “I was trying to find out and that was just the reason why I followed him.”

“Didn’t you see any one?” Fred asked.

“Yes, sir, I did,” replied Sam.

“What was he doing?” inquired John.

“I saw a skiff headed for Alexandria Bay.”

“How many were in it?”

“Two men.”

“What were they doing?”

“The last I saw of them they were pulling as if for dear life. That was why I couldn’t catch them.”

“And you think they were here on our dock?”

“I do,” explained Sam promptly. “I saw one man on the dock. Probably the other was in the skiff.”

“What were they doing?”

“Nothing when I first saw them. They were just getting ready to do it.”

“Do what?” demanded George.

“I guess it’s time for you boys to go back to your beds,” said Sam after a brief silence. “If you can’t tell, then I’m not going to explain.”

“Tell us, Sam, just what happened,” pleaded Fred.

For a moment the man was silent and then as if thinking better of his resolution, he said, “The fact is, boys, there was some one in the boat-house. I was sure of it though I couldn’t see any one. I heard him moving around and when I came out on the dock there I saw him just as plain as day. Just about that time he saw me too, and that was the first I knew that there were two of them, one in the skiff and one on the dock.”

“Were they near the Black Growler?” inquired Fred, who was keenly aroused by the story Sam was telling.

“They couldn’t have been nearer,” declared Sam, “but when they saw me, they started out as if the evil one was after them.”

“I don’t wonder,” suggested George.

“Huh?” said Sam quickly. “What’s that you say?”

“I think it would scare anybody if he thought you were trying to catch him,” said George glibly.

Mollified by the explanation, Sam continued, “They lighted out as soon as they both were in the skiff and the way they rowed was something marvelous. I chased them around the point, but if you’ll believe me when I got there they were already more than half-way to

Alexandria Bay.”

“They must have traveled fast,” laughed John.

“They didn’t delay any, let me tell you,” said Sam, shaking his head. “And they had good reason to hurry up.”

“Was anything wrong with the boat?” asked Fred.

“I haven’t found out yet. I don’t think they had time to do much harm.”

“What makes you think they wanted to harm the boat anyway?” asked Grant.

“Huh,” said Sam, turning abruptly upon the speaker. “What else could they want here?”

“I don’t know that they would want anything,” said Grant quietly. “When you have made up your mind that somebody is trying to put the Black Growler out of business it is easy for you to believe that everything is working for that one thing.”

“You don’t know as much as you might,” said Sam tartly.

“By which you mean?” inquired Grant.

“By which I mean just this,” responded Sam warmly. “The people that own the Varmint II are a tough crowd. They are some young fellows that have got more money than they have sense.”

“More dollars than cents, you mean, don’t you?” interrupted George.

“That’s what I said,” retorted Sam. “They are betting all sorts of money on their boat. From what I heard over at the Bay they have staked more money than you would believe on their boat winning the race.”

“Who told you about it?” inquired Fred.

“Never you mind that,” said Sam. “I know and that’s enough. Now, if they’ve got so much staked they wouldn’t feel so very bad, would they, if anything happened to the Growler? It seems she’s the only boat they are afraid of anyway, and if she isn’t in the race why the Varmint II will just walk away with the cup.”

“And do you really think,” inquired Fred, “that they will try to damage our boat so that she can’t be in the race?”

“I’m not saying THEY will,” answered Sam, “but somebody might. Perhaps they wouldn’t know anything about it.”

“Do you think those men who were here to-night came to do that?”

“I’m suspicious,” said Sam, “but I don’t know yet how much damage they did. I called you because I thought I might need your help. There isn’t anything more you can do now and you might as well go back to bed.”

With the coming of the day most of the fears and anxieties of the boys departed. The alarm of Sam the preceding night appeared very differently now and they even were inclined

to laugh at him for his fears. Sam, however, had fallen once more into one of his periods of silence and made no comment on the remarks of the Go Ahead boys.

“I’m going over to the Bay now,” said Sam when the boys after breakfast approached the dock.

“Are you going in the motor-boat?” inquired Fred.

“Yes, sir.”

“How long will you be there?”

“I don’t know. Probably an hour.”

“Then we’ll go over with you,” answered Fred. “Perhaps we’ll find one of these fellows who were trying to blow up the Black Growler last night.” “I’m not saying they were trying to blow her up,” retorted Sam. “You don’t have to blow up a boat to put it out of commission, do you? Her machinery is so fine that it wouldn’t take very much damage to one part to throw the whole thing out of gear.”

“That’s true,” said George, “but I don’t believe, Sam, that there’s need for our being scared. Probably those two men you saw last night were just stopping on their way back to the Bay from some of the islands.”

Sam shook his head and although he did not speak, his action implied that the Go Ahead boys might soon be wiser than they were at that time.

Nor was his suspicion misplaced. Not many hours had elapsed before they were almost as strong as Sam in their belief that the Black Growler was not only an object of dislike, but also that there was a real peril that she might be so injured that it would be impossible for her to enter the race.