

THE GO AHEAD BOYS AND THE RACING MOTOR-BOAT



Chapter 22: A Collision

In a brief time the Black Growler was fast to one of the side-docks and the party prepared to disembark.

“I’m not going to leave that boat without somebody stayin’ on board,” asserted Sam positively, when he was aware that the Go Ahead boys were all planning to accompany him.

“What are you afraid of?” inquired George. “There’s some one around here all the time and no one could do any damage without being seen.”

“It doesn’t make any difference,” asserted Sam. “A man might drop sand into the bearings or grease cups or do some other mean trick and nobody ever see him.”

“All right, then,” laughed George, “I’ll be the goat. I’ll stay here while you’re gone. I guess I shan’t be lonesome,” he added with a laugh as he glanced at the increasing assembly which already had been drawn to the dock to gaze at the beautiful little motor-boat.

Soon after the departure of his friends, George seated himself in the stern of the boat and did his utmost to appear indifferent to the admiring glances and words of approval which now were coming from the spectators.

He had secured a copy of the morning paper and was pretending to be interested in the news he was reading.

Suddenly he partly dropped the paper as in the crowd he discovered the canal-man, who had demanded their bond at Cape Vincent. For some reason which George was unable to understand he did not advance to the boat, preferring to remain on the outskirts of the little assembly. The fact, however, that the man was there was in itself somewhat startling.

Still pretending to be interested in his paper, George did his utmost to follow the actions of the man whom he had discovered, but not many minutes had elapsed before he departed from the dock.

When his friends returned the strange man had not come back.

“Did anything happen?” inquired Fred eagerly as he stepped on board.

“What did you think was going to happen?” answered George somewhat evasively.

“I didn’t think anything was,” laughed Fred. “Sam is the only one who is worried.”

“Well, he has some right to be worried, I guess,” said George slowly.

“Why, what’s wrong? What happened?” demanded Fred excitedly.

“Are you ready to explain what you did with that bond that belongs to the Go Ahead boys?” asked George slowly.

“No, sir, I’m not.”

“Then you’ll not be interested in the fact that the man who wanted it came down here to the dock while you were gone.”

“He did? He did?” exclaimed Fred so eagerly that his friends all laughed. “What did he want?”

“That, sir, I can’t explain to you at this time,” answered George, striving to mimic the tones and manner of his friend. “It’s difficult for me to tell the whole story unless I know what you all have to say.”

“I have nothing to say,” retorted Fred.

“Neither have I,” responded George glibly.

Meanwhile Sam had cast off and with his boat-hook had pushed the Black Growler out into the stream. The graceful lines of the motor-boat were more distinctly seen now and the enthusiasm of the spectators was somewhat noisily expressed.

At that moment, however, the Varmint II came sweeping in a great semi-circle toward the dock and the attention of the assembly was quickly divided.

The boys were able to overhear the comparisons which were made, some of them favorable to one boat and some to the other.

The Go Ahead boys, however, were so deeply interested in the sight of their rival that they gave slight heed to the comments. They were keenly watching the young men on board, but in a few minutes they were beyond the sight of the dock and the Varmint II consequently no longer could be seen.

“I tell you, Sam is right,” said George positively. “Those fellows on that Varmint II are a hard crowd. If they have been betting as much money as Sam says they have, it may be that there’s some reason for his being afraid that some accident may happen to the Black Growler.”

“It wouldn’t do any harm to keep pretty close watch anyway,” suggested Grant. “Whatever the weather is I think it will be better to run her into the boat-house every night and put double locks on the doors.”

“We’ll do more than that,” said Sam. “We’ll have somebody on the lookout. I guess it wouldn’t be very much of a job for you boys to divide the night up into watches. I’ll stay on duty until eleven or twelve o’clock and from then on until six wouldn’t take more than an hour and a half from each of you.”

“We’ll do that,” said Fred quickly. “That’s a good suggestion, Sam.”

“But if we have the Black Growler fast inside the boat-house how can any one get at her?” inquired John.

“My dear String,” said Grant solemnly, “I fear now that the remark of that wise Englishman was correct when he said that Nature never built men seven stories high without

the top lofts being left empty.”

“I have heard you say that before,” retorted John, irritated by the manner more than by the words of his friend.

“Well, all I can say is,” said Grant, “if you have any gray matter up there where your brain ought to be located you had better begin pretty soon to make it work. If a man wanted to break into the boat-house he wouldn’t have very much trouble in doing it, no matter how many padlocks we put on the doors.”

“That’s right,” spoke up George. “He could dive under the doors, or smash in the window or cut out a glass and if there wasn’t any one on guard he might never be detected. No, sir, we’ve got to establish a guard and the fellow who is on duty must keep up a regular patrol. He must keep walking around the dock all the time.”

“And there may be some other ways by which they will try to get at us besides injuring our boat,” suggested Grant.

“I don’t see what,” spoke up John quickly. “It’s the one boat they are afraid of and if they can only put the Black Growler out of business they won’t have anything to fear, as far as the outcome of the race is concerned. What could they do anyway?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Grant. “I can think of a dozen tricks they might play, any one of which might throw us out of the race.”

Grant’s words proved to be more prophetic than he had dreamed. That very afternoon after the boys had taken their daily run over a part of the triangular course where the great race was to be held, an event occurred which confirmed his statement and added strength to Sam’s warning.

The Black Growler already had finished her course and under low speed was moving with the current on her way back to the island where she belonged.

Suddenly and without any warning whistle, a swift little boat dashed out from behind one of the small islands which the Black Growler chanced to be passing at the time and almost before the boys were aware of what was occurring there was a collision.

“Look out! Look out there!” shouted Fred, who was steering, in his loudest tones. At the same time he did his utmost to change the course of the motor-boat. His words of warning, however, were either unheard or unheeded. There was a sharp collision, for the smaller boat was moving swiftly. This was followed by the sound of a grinding crash. In dismay the Go Ahead boys ran to the side of their boat and speedily discovered that the metal bow of the little boat before them had cut a long gash which extended below the water’s edge. Indeed, it was only by an effort that the other boat was freed. To all appearances she was uninjured. On board were two men, plainly belonging to the region.

“What’s the matter with you?” called one of the men on the other boat.

“What’s the matter with YOU?” retorted Fred. “Why didn’t you whistle before you turned the end of the island?”

“How were we to know anything was there if you didn’t let us know? You, yourself, ought to have whistled.”

The damage to the Black Growler, however, was not to be explained away by abuse or questions. Sam, already in the skiff, had brought it along-side and was inspecting the damage on the outside. As yet he had not made any suggestions and how serious the collision might prove to have been was not yet known.

Meanwhile the other boat hastily withdrew and when the Go Ahead boys again looked up to discover where it was, not one of them was able to find it.

“That’s a great note!” exclaimed George in disgust. “They not merely ram us, but they don’t wait nor even offer to help us.”

“They didn’t want to help,” grumbled Sam. “The sooner they could get away from here, the better.”

“What do you mean?” said Grant, abruptly turning to face Sam as he spoke.

“It seems to me,” spoke up John, “that Nature doesn’t have to make every fellow seven stories high to leave his topknot vacant. Sam thinks those fellows ran into us purposely.”

For a moment the Go Ahead boys stared blankly at one another. The suggestion of John in the light of what had occurred after the accident might be true. The men in the other boat were strangers to the boys, not one of whom had ever seen either of them before.

The silent manner in which the sharp little boat had come around the island also was suspicious. With redoubled anxiety the boys turned to Sam to discover how serious was the damage which had been inflicted.

“How do you find it, Sam?” called Fred anxiously. “Are we out of the race?”

Sam shook his head as if he either was unwilling or unable as yet to reply.

Meanwhile the Black Growler had been drifting with the current, all power instantly having been shut off. Slight effort was required to keep her headed aright and Fred had remained at the wheel when Sam had begun his investigations.

Conversation now ceased while all four boys anxiously awaited the results of Sam’s efforts to discover whether or not the Black Growler had suffered serious damage.