

# THE GO AHEAD BOYS AND THE RACING MOTOR-BOAT



## Chapter 23: The Call in the Night

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The only announcement which Sam vouchsafed after he had completed his hasty inspection of the damage which had been done was, "I guess she'll stand it all right as far as Alexandria Bay."

"Are you going to drift all the way, Sam?" inquired John.

"Drift? No! I'm going ahead. Seems to me I've heard some boys talk about 'goin' ahead,' and now's the time to find out whether they mean business or not."

Relieved by the manner of Sam, although he had not made any positive statement, the four Go Ahead boys eagerly watched him as under slow headway he carefully guided the swift little boat toward its destination.

An hour afterward, they arrived at Alexandria Bay. There Sam insisted once more upon the boys remaining on board while he sought the help he desired in repairing the Black Growler.

While the boys were awaiting his return, their conversation naturally turned upon the mishap which had befallen them and their anxiety concerning the outcome of the accident.

"I'm telling you," said John, "that I haven't seen but one fellow on the Varmint II that was on board when I came up the Hudson with them."

"What has become of the others?" inquired Fred.

"I don't know. I haven't seen any of them. I remember that one particular fellow because he made me think when I saw him that there weren't many things he would hesitate to do if he wanted to win pretty badly."

"Do you really think," inquired George, "that this 'accident' up here was not an accident at all? Do you honestly believe that they ran into us on purpose?"

"I'm not charging nobody with nothin', as Sam says," laughed John, "but it's strange that boat didn't give any warning."

"They said that we didn't give any warning either," spoke up Grant. "Perhaps we were as much to blame as they were."

"Well, if that's the only thing that happens to us," said Fred, "I shan't complain, that is, if the Black Growler isn't put out of the race."

"You'll have a good excuse, Peewee," laughed George, "if you lose the cup."

"How's that?" inquired Fred.

"Why, you can charge it up to the collision."

"I'm not going to charge it to anything but the boat," retorted Fred sharply. "If the

Black Growler doesn't win it isn't going to be the fault of any one but herself. There comes Sam with two men," he added, as the boatman was seen approaching, accompanied by two mechanics.

Another inspection of the damaged boat was made by the men whom Sam had brought, but their verdict coincided with his own. The Black Growler was marred, but no serious damage had been done.

"You're sure there isn't any leak, are you?" inquired Fred anxiously after the work was completed.

"Not a leak," laughed one of the men.

"All the same," spoke up Sam, "I'm going to leave the boat here and I'll be back for her to-night. Don't let any one come near her, and give her a thorough overhauling."

The men readily consented and soon departed, taking the Black Growler around the point to the spot where their boathouse was located.

The Go Ahead boys and Sam then took their places in the two skiffs which the Black Growler had had in tow and in a brief time arrived at the dock on the island owned by Mr. Button.

Fred's grandfather chanced to be in the boat-house when they arrived and in response to his inquiry concerning the motor-boat, Fred briefly related the story of the accident.

"Who was steering?" demanded Mr. Button sharply. "That's what comes of letting a lot of boys run such a delicate piece of work as that motor-boat. I told your father, Fred, that he ought not to get you any such plaything as that. I'll warrant that you were steering and not paying any attention."

Fred laughed as he said, "The fact is, Grandfather, that I was on the lookout but the other boat never whistled nor gave us any sign of their coming."

"Did you let them know that you were coming?"

"Why, no, we didn't whistle."

"Then I don't see that you have any one to blame but yourselves," said Mr. Button tartly. "It's just as I said."

"But we're not so sure that it was an accident," persisted Fred.

"No," laughed Mr. Button. "I suppose you think that other boat was hiding behind the rock ready to jump out at you the way a pickerel starts for a minnow."

"If that was the only thing," explained Fred, "we might agree with you. But the trouble is that we're afraid somebody wants to injure the Black Growler."

"Why?" demanded Mr. Button, turning abruptly upon the boys as he spoke.

"To put her out of the race."

For a moment Mr. Button stared blankly at his grandson and then said quietly, "Don't

you believe it. We don't have that kind of people around here. I shall have to write your father that you were to blame."

"And I'll write him and tell him all about it," said Fred angrily.

"See that you do. See that you do," said his grandfather as he turned to the house and left the boys standing on the dock.

"All the same," spoke up George, "I'm sure that that collision wasn't any accident. What do you think, Grant?"

"I confess I don't know," replied Grant. "If it was the only thing that had happened I might think it was an accident, but taken in connection with some other things we have found out, I'm almost afraid it wasn't."

"Then the only thing for us to do," said John, "is to keep watch. Sam is going to bring the Black Growler back here to-night and some one of us will have to be on guard all the time."

"I have got that all fixed," said Fred, taking a slip of paper from his pocket as he spoke; "I have divided the night into five watches. We'll let Sam stay on guard until eleven o'clock. I'll take the watch from eleven P. M. to twelve-thirty A. M. Grant can come on at twelve-thirty and stay until two, then George will take his place and stay until half-past three. John will be the last one and he can be the guard from half-past three until five o'clock. There won't be any need of any one after that because it will be light by that time."

"That's all right," spoke up George. "The only suggestion I have to make is that we rotate the hours, if we keep this up many nights."

"What do you mean?" inquired Fred.

"Why the one that comes on at eleven o'clock one night comes on at twelve-thirty the next night. The one who comes on at twelve-thirty will report at two and so on. We'll just keep pushing the schedule up every night so we'll all be the same when we're done."

"How shall we know when our turns come?" inquired John.

"Every fellow is to call the one who is to take his place."

"But suppose the villain comes between spells?"

"We'll have to take our chances on that," said John.

The proposed scheme was finally accepted. About six o'clock Sam returned with the Black Growler and when the plan was explained to him he readily consented to accept the part which had been assigned to him.

That night at eleven o'clock he called Fred who was to have the first watch. After the first half-hour the young guard in the silence that rested over the great river found the time dragging heavily. In order to keep awake he walked about the dock, peering intently in every direction. Not a sign of danger had been discovered, however, when at half-past twelve he

summoned Grant to take his place.

Grant also was not molested and when he called George at two o'clock he said sleepily, "It all seems like fool business anyway, Pop."

"You've been asleep," retorted George.

"I haven't closed my eyes," retorted Grant sharply. "If you do as well you'll be lucky."

A half-hour after George had entered upon his task he stopped and peered through the window into the boathouse. The light of the moon made many of the objects within clear and distinct. The Black Growler was lying peacefully in her slip. Apparently peril was nowhere threatening.

Suddenly, as George glanced at the farther end of the platform beside the slip, he stopped abruptly and stepped quickly back from the window. Approaching the place again, he cautiously peered within and his first impressions were confirmed. He was able to see distinctly the figure of a man crouching in a corner of the room.

Instantly George's heart was thumping wildly and he was tempted to shout to the intruder. Hastily banishing the impulse he watched the man. The dim outline of his figure was distinctly seen. Perhaps the intruder had been startled by the discovery of the face at the window. At all events he remained motionless and not a sound was heard save the lapping of the little waves against the dock.

By this time George's fears had returned in full force. He decided quickly to summon the Go Ahead boys and not attempt alone to drive away the intruder. That the man's purpose in coming was evil he had no question. What other explanation was to be had for the presence of a strange man in the boat-house at three o'clock in the morning?

Running silently and swiftly to the house, George speedily summoned his friends, who were wide awake as soon as the report of his discovery of the man in the boat-house was heard.

"Shall I take a gun?" whispered Fred to his companion.

"No," said Grant sharply. "We don't want any gun."

"Well, some of us ought to have clubs or something," persisted Fred.

"I don't think we shall want anything," said Grant, "but if you're afraid, bring along two or three bats."

These weapons were secured and then silently the four Go Ahead boys departed from the house and stealthily approached the boat-house in which George had discovered the presence of the intruder.