

THE GO AHEAD BOYS AND THE RACING MOTOR-BOAT



Chapter 25: The Owner of the Bond

A loud laugh arose from the people on board the Varmint II when the floating leg was more clearly seen.

Indeed the last sound that came to the ears of the Go Ahead boys from their rivals when the boat no longer was seen was a mocking echo of their song,

”Saw my leg off—

Short!”

A half-hour afterward the Go Ahead boys stopped at one of the largest islands and all four went ashore.

On their return to the dock they were followed by a very persistent Armenian who apparently was unshaken in his determination to sell certain articles he was peddling.

”I tell you,” said Fred sharply, turning upon the dark-complexioned man, “we don’t want any of your rugs or table cloths.”

”Yees, kind sir, but just see these mooch fine han’ki’chiefs.”

”But we don’t want any,” said Fred.

”But, my gud sir, they are ver’ cheep.”

By this time the boys had arrived at the landing and still the persistent peddler gave them no rest. He was calling his wares and insisting upon an inspection of them, ignoring the protests of the boys.

Finally in despair Fred reached beneath the seat and drew forth one of Sam’s artificial legs. He waved it before the startled Armenian who gazed at it a moment in manifest fear and then uttering a loud scream ran back to his basket.

A laugh arose from the assembly on the dock who had been watching the experiences of the boys. The Armenian, however, did not delay and when the Black Growler departed, the boys were able to see the disappearing figure of their tormentor walking rapidly up the hill.

There he turned and looked back at the dock, but although the boat had departed, apparently his fears were only slightly relieved, for he soon disappeared.

”That’s the best thing we’ve found in a long while,” laughed George. “The way for us to get rid of all peddlers is to shake an arm or wave a leg at them.”

”We may have to try again before long,” suggested Fred. “This is the time when most of the peddlers come here.”

Meanwhile the Black Growler was moving swiftly down the river. The talk of the excited boys soon turned toward the prospect of the race and somehow it was manifest that a measure of confidence had returned to Fred. So much had been said of late concerning

the prowess of the Varmint II by the boys who delighted in teasing their friend, that Fred had arrived at a stage of mind when it was difficult for him to distinguish between the words that were spoken in bantering and in earnest.

“I’ll tell you what I’m going to do,” said George as the swift little boat came within sight of Alexandria Bay.

“What are you going to do?” inquired John.

“I’m going to take my right arm out of my coat and tie it behind me. Then I’m going to put one of Sam’s artificial arms in the sleeve and find somebody to shake hands with me. He’ll shake so hard that I’m half afraid my arm will come off.”

“That’s all right,” laughed his companions as they assisted George to carry out his plan.

When the motor-boat stopped at the dock the artificial arm had been placed in the coat sleeve and George was assisted to the dock.

There George discovered one of the men who had helped in repairing the Black Growler.

“Hello!” called the mechanic, discovering the boys and at once approaching.

“Hello, to you!” called back George. “It’s been a long time since I have seen you. I shan’t forget you for I have three or four good reasons.”

“I hope you won’t,” laughed the mechanic, “but I should like to know what your reasons are.”

“One reason,” said George seriously, “was that you never shook hands with me in the morning when you came to work.”

“I didn’t know you wanted me to,” said the man. “I’ll make up for lost time now.” As he spoke he grasped the hand which extended from George’s right sleeve and as George at that same moment turned quickly away, the astonished handshaker stood holding in his grasp an arm which had apparently come from the sleeve of the boy.

“That’s right,” said George soberly, pretending to be much grieved. “That’s right. First you don’t shake hands and then you shake hands so hard that you take my arm right off.”

The sight had quickly drawn many of the people who were loitering about the dock and for a moment they were startled to see what had been apparently a serious accident.

“It’s nothing,” said George, turning to the assembly. “This man shook hands with me and the first thing I know he had shaken my arm off. He’s welcome to it, however, and I hope it will do him some good.”

The crowd was laughing noisily by this time and when George turned back to resume his place on board the motor-boat, the mechanic was the center of an observing throng which was inspecting the arm that he still was holding.

Upon the return of the boys to the island, they discovered that Fred's grandfather was seated upon the piazza conversing with a man whose form impressed the Go Ahead boys as being familiar.

When they drew near the house John exclaimed in a low voice, "That's our friend that we saw on the canal-boat."

His startled companions again glanced hastily at the man and Grant said, "You're right for once in your life, String. That's just who it is."

"What is he doing here?" demanded John.

"I can't tell you," said Fred.

"Was he expected this morning?"

"Not to my knowledge."

When the boys went up the steps, however, Mr. Button summoned all four to come to the place where he was seated.

Somewhat startled by the invitation the boys approached, all glancing in some confusion at the man seated near Mr. Button. He was dressed in a different suit now and many of his ways and manners had been changed for the better. He was now at his ease and the twinkle that appeared in his eyes was far different from the expression which the boys had seen there in their earlier experiences with the man.

"You appear to be acquainted with this man," suggested Mr. Button dryly.

"We have seen him before," said George.

"And not exactly where you wanted to see him, I fancy," laughed Mr. Button. "Do you know who he is?"

"No, sir," said George quickly, "and we don't know what he is either."

"Well, this is Mr. Brown from Syracuse," explained Mr. Button. "A gang of bank robbers got into one of the vaults there some time ago and got away with a large number of bonds. Mr. Brown was detailed to find and catch the thieves if possible."

As Mr. Button ceased speaking the interest and excitement of the boys at once increased.

They looked eagerly at one another and at Mr. Brown, who now assumed an importance in their eyes, which before he had not had, even when they believed him to be a false claimant to the bond which they had found on board the Black Growler.

"Are you a detective?" inquired John, turning to Mr. Brown as he spoke.

"I don't speak of myself in that way," replied Mr. Brown, "and yet—"

"That's what he is," interrupted Mr. Button "He already has run down and found most of the bonds."

"How did that one come to be on our boat?" inquired Grant.

“Why, I had it in my pocket,” laughed Mr. Brown, “and I put it under the cushion for safe keeping. You see, I joined that crowd and they thought I was one of the canal-men. I was with them for ten days at least and finally I found out what I wanted to know.”

“Were they the bank thieves?” asked George eagerly.

“Some of them,” replied Mr. Brown. “They were strangely mixed up. In fact that is one of the tricks they have, I am told. When a bank is broken into if the men are successful they scatter so that no two are in the same locality. It took me a long time to get in with these men but I finally succeeded. Indeed the care of some of the stolen bonds was left to me. They were not very easily converted into cash by any of them and as they all believed I was really a yeggman they finally let me into their secrets.”

“Where are they now?” asked Fred.

“Some of them are missing but two have been taken into custody. I have forwarded the bond, which you boys unconsciously were carrying on the Black Growler, to the bank to be restored to its proper owners.”

After the boys went to their rooms they were still discussing the story of the lost bond.

The fact that one of the gang, which had forced its way on board the boat while they were passing through the Erie Canal, had turned out to be a detective, was sufficient to arouse the keenest interest among the Go Ahead boys. Indeed, in the afternoon they insisted upon Mr. Brown accompanying them once more while they made another test of the racing motor-boat on the course.

Mr. Brown, upon the insistence of the Go Ahead boys, related many of the stirring experiences which he had had as a detective and when he departed, after they had returned to the island, they were all delighted with the changed man. How he had been able to pass himself among the professional bank thieves as one of their number was an increasing marvel to all four.

It was still agreed that the boat-house must be guarded every night. The various watches were continued, for the fear of the boys that some evil might befall their boat was still with them.

Mr. Button laughed good-naturedly at their precautions, declaring that a thief was almost unknown in the entire region. However, he offered no objections and the boys arranged their vigils as on the preceding nights.

No evil had befallen the racing motor-boat, however, when morning came.

The race now was only two days distant. Only one night therefore intervened and the irksome task of guarding the boat-house would only have to be performed once more. The vigil of the Go Ahead boys, however, was not rewarded by detecting the presence of any

one with plots against the Black Growler.

The day of the race dawned clear and fair. The excitement among the boys had now become intense. Everything had been done for the swift little racer that had been in the power of the boys.

Her sides were glistening and her machinery oiled and polished and when at last she was declared by Sam to be ready for the supreme trial, all the Go Ahead boys were agreed that never before had their boat been more capable of making her highest speed than at the present time.