

VICTORIOUS UNION

by Oliver Optic

Chapter 25: The Principal Officers of the St. Regis

Christy Passford was astounded and confounded when he read the commission. He modestly believed that he had already been promoted beyond his deserving, though no one else, not even his father, thought so. He had not sought promotion at any time, and he had been hurried through four grades in something over three years. He was the heir of millions, and he had given all his pay to wounded sailors and the families of those who had fallen in naval actions.

His share of the prize money resulting from the captures in which he had taken part as commander or in some subordinate position had made him a rich man; and with his mother's assistance, he was disbursing no small portion of his wealth among those who had been deprived of their support by the casualties of the war. He had not expected or even hoped for any further promotion, though the newspaper had extolled to the skies his brilliant exploit in the Gulf.

"What does this mean, father?" asked Christy, dropping into a chair as if overwhelmed by the contents of the envelope.

"It means just what it says, my son," replied Captain Passford. "But I know that it is necessary now for me to explain that this promotion is none of my doing; for I have not asked it, I have not urged it, I have not made the remotest suggestion that you should be made a lieutenant-commander, as I have not done on any former occasion."

"That is enough, father; your plea of not guilty would have been enough to satisfy me," added Christy.

"I prevented your appointment to the command of the Chateaugay, and procured your position as second lieutenant of the Bellevite; and these two instances are absolutely all the requests I have ever made to the department in relation to you," protested the captain.

"That helps the matter very much," answered Christy. "I have been the victim of supposed partiality, 'a friend at court' and all that sort of thing, till I am disgusted with it."

"And all that has been in consequence of your over-sensitiveness rather than anything that ever was said about you."

"Perhaps it was. But as a lieutenant-commander I might still remain as executive officer of the Bellevite, for Captain Breaker has been a commander for over two years," suggested Christy.

"The department has made another disposition of you, and without any hint or suggestion from me, my son," said Captain Passford, as he took another envelope from his pocket, and presented it to his son. "This came to me by this morning's mail; and I have withheld the commission till I received it."

"And what may this be, father?" asked Christy, looking from the missive to the captain's face,



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which was glowing with smiles, for he was as proud of his only son as he ought to have been.

“Christy, you remind me of some old ladies I have met, who, when they receive a letter, wonder for five or ten minutes whom it is from before they break the envelope, when a sight of the contents would inform them instantly,” added the captain, laughing.

“But I am afraid the contents of this envelope will be like the explosion of a mine to me, and therefore I am not just like the old ladies you have met,” returned the lieutenant-commander. “One mine a day let off in my face is about all I can stand.”

“Open the envelope!” urged his father rather impatiently.

“It never rains but it pours!” exclaimed Christy, when he had looked over the paper it enclosed. “I am appointed to the command of the St. Regis! I think some one who gives names to our new vessels must have spent a summer with Paul Smith at his hotel by the river and lake of that name; and the same man probably selected the name of Chateaugay. I suppose it is some little snapping gunboat like the Bronx; but I don’t object to her on that account.”

“She is nothing like the Bronx, for she is more than twice as large; and you have already seen some service on her deck.”

“Some steamer that has had her name changed. But I have served regularly only on board of the Bellevite and the Bronx, and it cannot be either of them,” said Christy, with a puzzled expression.

“She is neither the one nor the other. She has had three names: the first was the Trafalgar, the second the Tallahatchie, and the third the St. Regis,” continued the captain.

“Is it possible!” exclaimed Christy, relapsing into silent thoughtfulness, for he could hardly believe the paper from which he had read his appointment; and officers far his senior in years would have rejoiced to receive the command of such a ship.

“Not only possible, but an accomplished fact; and the only sad thing about it is that you must sail in the St. Regis day after to-morrow.”

“I am informed that my orders will come by to-morrow,” added the lieutenant-commander.

“The ship is all ready for sea. An eight-inch Parrot has been substituted for the Armstrong gun, the same as the midship gun of the Bellevite,” the captain explained. “Perhaps you would like to know something about your fellow-officers, Christy.”

“I certainly should, father, for whatever success I may have will depend largely upon them,” replied the embryo commander of the St. Regis.

“Your executive officer will be Lieutenant George Baskirk,” continued Captain Passford, reading from a paper he took from his pocket.

“Good! He was the second lieutenant of the Bronx when I was in command of her; and a better or braver officer never planked a deck.”

“He was available, and I suggested him. Your second lieutenant is Joel Makepeace, just promoted from the rank of master. He is fifty-two years old, but as active as ever he was. He is a regular old sea dog, and commanded an Indiaman for me fifteen years ago; but you never met him. He has made a good record in the war, and I feel sure that you will like him.”

“I have no doubt I shall, father; and I like the idea of having an officer who is old enough to be my father, and who has had a great deal of experience at sea,” replied Christy.



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“He was an able seaman and petty officer in the navy for three years when he was a young man, and has served as a master from the beginning of the war,” continued Captain Passford.

“Probably he does not like the idea of being under the command of one who has not yet reached his majority in years,” suggested the commander of the *St. Regis*.

“On the contrary, he seemed to be delighted with his appointment. Your third lieutenant is Ensign Palmer Drake who brought home your prize.”

“He is a good man and a good officer, and I am entirely satisfied with him.”

“Ensign Barton French is to serve as master on board of your ship. Some doubts were expressed in regard to his knowledge of navigation, and he passed a very creditable examination.”

“I am very glad indeed that he has obtained his promotion, and that he is to sail with me,” added Christy, who had taken quite an interest in him as an able seaman, and had procured his appointment as prize-master of the *West Wind*.

“Dr. Connolly, who was with you in the Bronx, is your surgeon. The chief engineer of the *St. Regis* is one Paul Vapoor,” continued Captain Passford, with a very obvious twinkle of the eyes.

“Paul Vapoor!” exclaimed Christy, leaping out of the chair in which he had just settled himself after the excitement of his father’s first announcement had partly subsided.

“Paul Vapoor,” repeated the captain.

“It can hardly be possible,” persisted Christy.

“What is the matter? Has Captain Breaker fallen out with him?”

“Not at all; the commander of the *Bellevite* thinks as much of him as ever he did, and even a great deal more.”

“Then how under the canopy does Paul happen to be appointed to the *St. Regis*?” demanded Christy.

Captain Passford took from his pocket a letter he had received from Captain Breaker, and proceeded to read portions of it, as follows: “If Christy is not promoted and given an adequate independent command, I shall be disappointed; and given such whether he consents or not. He has never been wanting in anything; and though I say it to his father, there is not a more deserving officer in the service, not even one who is ten years older. I have expressed myself fully in my report. I believe his gallant exploit in the late action with the *Tallahatchie* saved the lives of at least one-fourth of my ship’s company; and it thinned out the ranks of the enemy in about the same proportion. Captain Rombold insists that he should have captured the *Bellevite* if the tide had not been thus turned against him; but I do not admit this, of course.

“I still set the highest value upon the services of Chief Engineer Paul Vapoor, and I should regret exceedingly to lose him. But Christy and Paul have been the most intimate friends from their school days; and if your son is appointed to an independent command, as I believe he ought to be, it would do something towards reconciling him to his appointment if his crony were in the same ship with him. For this reason, and this alone, I am willing to sacrifice my own wishes to the good of the service. I have talked with Paul about the matter, and he would be delighted to be the companion of Christy, even in a small steamer.”

“Captain Breaker is very kind and very considerate, as he always was; and I shall certainly feel



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more at home on board of the St. Regis with Paul Vapoor as her chief engineer,” replied Christy; and the effect seemed to be what the commander of the Bellevite anticipated. “Go on with the list, father.”

“Paul’s first assistant engineer will be Charles Graines,” continued Captain Passford.

“That is very good; but Charley is a sailor as well as a machinist, and I may borrow him of Paul on some special occasions, for he has what Captain Breaker calls ingenuity, as well as bravery and skill.”

“The second assistant is Amos Bolter, a brother of Leon, who has been first assistant of the Bellevite from the beginning of the war, and who has been promoted to chief at the suggestion of the commander in the letter from which I have just read. The third assistant is John McLaughlin, whom Paul knows if you do not. These are your principal officers; and we had better go and see your mother and Florry now.”

“I have good news for you and your family, Captain Passford, for I am informed that I have been exchanged, and need trespass no longer upon your generous and kindly hospitality,” said the commander.

“That is no news to me, Captain Rombold, for I had the pleasure of suggesting the officers for whom you and the doctor might be exchanged,” replied the host with a pleasant laugh. “But I assure you in all sincerity that you have both of you been the farthest possible from trespassers.”

“I do not feel that I have yet half reciprocated the kindness you extended to my son,” added Mrs. Passford.

“I wish I could do ten times as much for you as I have been able to do,” said Florry.

“Though wounded I have passed four of the pleasantest weeks of my life here; and I shall never forget your kindness to me,” said the commander, grasping the hand of his host; and his example was followed by the surgeon.

“We have been made happier by your presence with us than we could have made you, gentlemen,” added Mrs. Passford.

Not a word about politics or the cause of the war had been spoken.

