

VICTORIOUS UNION

by Oliver Optic

Chapter 24: Lieutenant-Commander Christopher Passford

Christy Passford dropped asleep when left alone in the sitting-room, and his slumber lasted a full hour. During this time Mr. Graines had related the incidents of the action in which he had been wounded, and given a full account of the expedition to Mobile Point. He was not sparing in his praise; but he brought it out in what had been said by others, especially by the commanders of both vessels and in the demonstrations of the seamen of the *Bellevite*.

When the wounded officer awoke it was with a start, and he was surprised to find he had been asleep in the midst of such happy surroundings. He rose from his couch, and found that his mother and sister had left the room. He passed out into the hall, and there heard the voice of the engineer in the library which he entered at once.

"I hope you feel better, my son," said his mother, as she and Florry rose from their chairs rejoicing anew at his return home after the fearful peril through which he had passed, for the recital of his brilliant exploits by his friend had been intensely thrilling to both of them.

"I'm all right, mother dear; I was only tired a little, for I have taken more exercise to-day than usual lately," replied Christy, as Mrs. Passford kissed him again and again, and Florry followed her example.

"Charley Graines has told us all about it, Christy," said his sister.

"So you have been spinning a yarn, have you, Charley?" asked the hero.

"I have related only the simple truth, Christy, for I knew you would not tell them the whole of it," replied the engineer.

"I am afraid you were reckless, my son," added Mrs. Passford.

"Reckless!" exclaimed Christy. "When I saw my duty there was no alternative but to do it; and that was all I did. You have been decorating your yarn, Charley."

"Not a particle; and Captain Breaker would confirm everything I have said," protested Mr. Graines. "So would Captain Rombold, if he were here, as I suppose he will be soon."

"That reminds me, mother, that you are to have some visitors; for I expect Captain Rombold and Dr. Davidson will be here some time to-day, for I have spoken to have them paroled," interposed Christy.

"Who is Dr. Davidson, my son?" asked his mother.

"He was the surgeon of the *Tallahatchie*. Both of your visitors are rebels to the very core," added the lieutenant playfully. "I was hit in the arm by a bullet when I was in the mizzen rigging; but I did not report to the surgeon"—

"As you ought to have done," interrupted the engineer.



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“Dr. Linscott had his hands full, and I did not want to bother him then. I went on board of the prize to take a look at the disabled Armstrong gun. Captain Rombold, who was wounded in the right thigh, was sitting on the quarter-deck. He spoke to me, for I was well acquainted with him. While we were talking, I began to feel faint, and slumped down on the deck like a woman. The captain sent for his surgeon, though his own wound had not been dressed; and Dr. Davidson was the gentleman who came, and very soon I felt better. They treated me like a brother; and that is the reason I have asked to have them both sent here.”

“I am very glad you did, Christy; and we will do everything we can for them,” added Mrs. Passford.

The father and mother of Mr. Graines lived in Montgomery, two miles distant, and he was anxious to see them. Leaving Christie in the hands of his mother and sister, he took his leave early in the afternoon. Later in the day a carriage stopped at the mansion, and the expected visitors, attended by the naval officer who had paroled them, were admitted by the servant. As soon as they were announced, Christy hastened to the hall, followed by his mother and sister. The captain carried a crutch, and was also supported by the doctor and the naval lieutenant.

“I am very glad to see you, Captain Rombold,” said Christy, as he gave his hand to the commander. “And you, Dr. Davidson;” and he proceeded to present them to his mother and sister.

“This is Lieutenant Alburgh of your navy, Mr. Passford; and he has been very attentive to us,” interposed the surgeon, introducing the paroling officer.

“I am very happy to know you, Mr. Alburgh;” and he presented him to Mrs. Passford and Florry.

The lieutenant declined an invitation to dinner; for he was in haste to return to New York, going back to the station in the carriage that had brought him. Mrs. Passford invited the party to the sitting-room, and Christy and the doctor assisted the wounded commander. He was placed upon the sofa, where he reclined, supported by the cushions arranged by the lady of the house.

“I am extremely grateful to you both, gentlemen, for your kindness to my son when he was beyond my reach, and it affords me very great pleasure to obtain the opportunity to reciprocate it in some slight degree,” said Mrs. Passford, when the captain declared that he was very comfortable in his position on the sofa.

“And I thank you with all my heart for what you did for my brother,” added Florry.

“You more than repay me; and, madam, permit me to congratulate you on being the mother of such a son as Lieutenant Passford,” replied Captain Rombold warmly. “I am still a rebel to the very centre of my being; but that does not prevent me from giving the tribute of my admiration to an enemy who has been as brave, noble, and generous as your son. The brilliant exploit of Mr. Passford, I sincerely believe, cost me my ship, and at least the lives or limbs of a quarter of my ship’s company. It was one of the most daring and well-executed movements I ever witnessed in my life, madam.”

“Please to let up, Captain,” interposed Christy, blushing as Florry would have done if Paul Vapoor had entered the room at that moment.

“He is as modest as he is brave, Mrs. Passford. It was sheer admiration for the young officer which compelled me to send for my own surgeon when he sank fainting upon the deck, with the blood streaming from the ends of his fingers,” added the commander.



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“If you are going to talk about this matter the rest of the day, Captain Rombold, I must beg you to excuse me if I retire,” interposed Christy, rising from his chair.

“I won’t say another word about it, Mr. Passford!” protested the captain. “But I hope your mother will have a chance to read Captain Breaker’s report of the action, for he and I are of the same opinion in regard to the conduct of your son.”

“My husband will doubtless bring me a copy of it,” added the lady.

In deference to the wishes of Christy, nothing more was said about the action, at least so far as it related to him. After some general conversation, the surgeon suggested that he had not dressed the wounds of his patients that day, and the commander was assisted to the principal guest chamber, while the lieutenant went to his own apartment.

Captain Passford was detained three days in Washington by important business at the Navy Department. Captain Breaker’s report of the action resulting in the capture of the Tallahatchie had reached its destination, and the proud father was in possession of all the details of the battle. He telegraphed and wrote to his son; and it was another joyful occasion at Bonnydale when he arrived there.

Dr. Davidson remained at the mansion for three weeks, until his patients were convalescent, though he went every day to the hospital of the prisoners of war to see the wounded of his ship. Captain Passford had given the visitors a very cordial and hearty welcome on his return, and expressed his gratitude to them for their kindness to his son in the strongest terms. He did every possible thing to promote their comfort and happiness, and the reign of Christianity continued at Bonnydale as it had been begun on board of the Bellevite and the Tallahatchie.

In two weeks Christy’s wound had practically healed, though his arm was not yet the equal of the other. His father spent all the time he could spare at home, and long talks between father and son were the order of the day. The lieutenant had been informed on his arrival of the death of Mr. Pembroke, Bertha’s father, two months before; but she had gone to visit an uncle in Ohio, and Christy had not yet seen her.

“I expect Miss Pembroke will be here to-morrow, Christy,” said Captain Passford one day, about three weeks after his return. “I suppose you are of the same mind in regard to her.”

“I am, father,” replied Christy, for he was about the same as a younger brother in his relations with him. “But I have not heard a word from her, any more than from you, since I left home.”

“There has been no occasion to send a store-ship or other vessel to the Eastern Gulf squadron, though one sailed about a week before your arrival, and letters were forwarded to you,” replied the captain. “Doubtless one or more went from her to you. She cannot have heard of your arrival; for I lost the address of her uncle in Ohio, and we could not write to her. Her father had a little property; and at her request I have been appointed her guardian, and she will reside at Bonnydale in the future.”

Bertha Pembroke arrived the next day, and what Christy needed to complete his happiness was supplied, and now his cup was overflowing. But he did not forget that he still owed a duty to his suffering country. Even the fascinations of the beautiful girl could not entice him to remain in his beloved home while his arm was needed to help on the nation’s cause to a victorious Union.

At the end of four weeks, he felt as well as ever before in his life, and he was impatient to return



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to the Bellevite. For a week before he had been talking to his father about the matter; and Bertha knew her betrothed, as he was by this time, too well to make any objection to his intended departure.

The Tallahatchie had been promptly condemned, and the fact that she was a superior vessel for war purposes, and her great speed compared with most vessels in the navy, had caused her to be appropriated to the use of the government. Orders had been given weeks before for her thorough repair and better armament, all of which had been hastily accomplished. Christy had not been to New York since his return; and for some reason of his own, his father had said very little to him about the service, perhaps believing that his son had better give his whole mind to the improvement of his health and strength.

“I hope you have found a vessel by which I can return to the Eastern Gulf squadron, father,” said Christy one morning, with more earnestness than usual. “I begin to feel guilty of neglect of duty while I am loafing about home.”

“Don’t trouble yourself, my son,” replied Captain Passford, who seemed to be rather exhilarated about something. “You shall return to your duty in due time, though not in exactly the same position as before.”

“Am I to be appointed to some other ship, father?” asked Christy, gazing earnestly into the captain’s face to read what was evidently passing in his mind, for it made him very cheerful.

“You are to sail in another ship, Christy; but wait a minute and I will return,” said Captain Passford, as he left the sitting-room and went to his library.

Opening his safe he took from it a ponderous envelope bearing official imprints, and returned to the sitting-room. Handing it to his son, he dropped into an arm-chair and observed him with close attention.

“What’s this, father?” asked the young officer.

“I have had it about three weeks, but waited for your entire recovery before I gave it to you,” replied the captain. “Open it.”

Christy did so, read it, and then in his excitement, dropped it on the floor. It was his commission as a lieutenant-commander.

