





# A GREAT GENERAL AND HIS MOTHER

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*Illustrated by William Mark Young*

“When I am older I mean to be a sailor and go to sea,” said young George Washington, as he watched the ships sail up the river.

The white sails of the ships looked like great white wings of some large birds, and when a boat came up to their own dock and landed, everyone on the plantation was very much excited. Then would come busy days of unloading cargoes and loading up with the tobacco grown on their own plantation; and often, when little George went down on the dock with his father, he would listen to the yarns told by the sailors, and the young boy was thrilled with a spirit of adventure.

“How I wish that I could go to sea and visit these interesting lands! Do you think that I can be a sailor, father?”

“Why, who knows, George, maybe you will serve the King and be an admiral in the navy,” laughed his father. And then he would tell his eager little son stories of his own boyhood and travels.

Mr. Washington sent his two older sons, Lawrence and Augustine, back to England to be educated; but he sent little George to

a district school near home—to a schoolmaster named Mr. Hobby. George was a born leader and soon was drilling all of his schoolmates. He marched them across the school ground, carrying cornstalks for guns, and they willingly followed their young general. For was he not the strongest boy in their group? He could outwrestle any of the boys, and he won all of their races. His schoolmates told with great pride of the time that he threw a stone far across the river. And not only did he lead them on the playground in outdoor sports, but in the schoolroom as well, where he was especially bright in mathematics.

Madam Washington trained her children at a very early age; so that little George knew how to read, write, spell, and cipher before he went to school. His devoted mother not only taught young George his lessons, but she trained him most carefully to be always obedient to those in authority, and to be courteous in his speech and actions. She saw that he inherited her own quick temper; and so she helped him to control himself. She taught him to reverence and obey the laws of God, and she was

pleased when she saw him trying to choose the right, and developing in character and self-control.

Young George was very happy when his older half brothers came home, and especially did he worship as a hero his elder brother Lawrence, who had served in the King's Navy and had fought in real battles under Admiral Vernon. The boy listened with breathless interest to the stories of the sea told by Lawrence, and many times he said, "When I am older, I will go to sea and fight in the King's Navy like brother Lawrence."

When George was only eleven years old his father died, and Mrs. Washington had to carry on the work of the plantation as well as to train her children; but she was a very capable woman and her children and her servants obeyed her implicitly.

The two older sons of Mr. Washington were married and went to live on their own plantations, and when Mrs. Washington saw that George had outgrown the district school and the teachings of Mr. Hobby, she let him go to live at Bridges Creek with his brother Augustine, where he attended a good school. Sometimes during his holidays he went home to visit his mother, and sometimes he drove over to visit his brother Lawrence at his beautiful home on the Potomac, which Lawrence had named Mount Vernon in honor of his commander at sea.

Whenever George talked with Lawrence he felt again that great desire to go to sea, which had been in his mind all of his life, and one time, when he was fourteen years old, he spoke very seriously with Lawrence about his desires.

"My mother does not need me at home upon the plantation," he said. "What, then, of my future? I must fit myself for something. Could I not go as a midshipman and work myself up in the King's Navy?"

Lawrence approved of the plan and so did

his brother Augustine, and they talked it over with Madam Washington. She felt at first that she could not let her youngest son go so far away from her; but she knew that the time had come for him to choose some occupation in life, and she knew how much he longed to go to sea, and so she gave a somewhat unwilling consent.

Lawrence, knowing many officers in England, felt sure that he could obtain a place for George in the Navy, and wrote at once in behalf of his young brother. At last all of the plans were made and young George put on his sailor's suit. He was so delighted with himself as a young midshipman that he walked about the plantation showing his clothes to all of his friends.

He was happy to enter the service of the King, and he was glad that at last he could sail far across the sea and visit the lands of which he had heard so many tales. Almost on the eve of his sailing, Madam Washington sent for him. As soon as George saw his mother he knew that something had happened, for she looked very white and sad, and her hand trembled as she gave him a letter to read from her brother who lived in England. She had written to this brother in regard to George and his plans for the future, and he had answered her inquiries in the most emphatic manner.

"If you care for the boy's future, do not let him go to sea," he wrote, and added that the boy would be "treated like a dog."

George read the letter from beginning to end and then reread it. Angry words trembled upon his lips. Why should this uncle meddle in his affairs? Why had his mother written for such advice, when Lawrence had given his permission, and he knew the life at sea? The spirited boy flushed and his eyes kindled with fire, while he bit his lips to keep silent, for his mother was speaking to him.

"My son, you can see by this letter that we have not chosen wisely in regard to your

future. I am now unwilling to let you go to sea."

"You have already given your consent, Madam," said the young lad, trying hard to control his voice, "and my brothers, Lawrence and Augustine, approve of the plan."

"We will not discuss it, my son," said Madam Washington with great dignity. "I have withdrawn my permission—you will remain here."

The angry boy made no answer—he felt crushed and rebellious, and he had to think it out alone. So he left the room, went out, and paced up and down the garden path, struggling with himself.

It was too much to ask him to give up all his dreams and hopes in life because his uncle, whom he had never seen, had given this contrary advice. Lawrence knew—he had served under Admiral Vernon, and as the elder brother he had given permission; that was enough. He was strongly tempted to leave his mother and sail away as he had planned, and many a boy would have yielded to that temptation and would have run away to sea, but not young George Washington. He thought it all over, step by step. He knew what he desired to do, but what of his mother and her desires? She had commanded him to stay at home, and if he disobeyed her she would be very unhappy. She would be disappointed in him that he could not yield his desires to her will. Was he fit to be of service to the King when he wished to disobey the commands of his own mother? Did he love his mother more than himself?

The struggle was a bitter one. But finally his love for his mother overcame all his own personal desires and, walking into the house, he stood before her and said solemnly, "Madam, it shall be as you desire."

Mrs. Washington knew what a struggle this had been for her spirited lad and, placing her arms about him, she kissed him

gently and said, "My son, I thank you, and may God grant that you never regret your choice."

Tears were streaming down her cheeks as she left the room, and the young man, who had never seen his mother so moved, knew that she understood how much it had meant to him to make this decision for her.

God did bless George Washington in his choice, and he never regretted it, for God is a God of love, and the devoted love of that son for his mother was the love directed by God which developed that young man until he was a chosen leader of his people.

We all know that the young George Washington went back to school and became a surveyor in the wilderness. Had he been in the King's Navy, he never would have been fitted to lead troops to victory through this wilderness. And at last we find that George Washington was chosen the General of the Continental Army who were fighting against their King in the cause of liberty.

General George Washington was called from his beautiful wife and home to serve his country through seven long years of war. He went home to rest and again was called upon to lead the people as the first President of these United States, and for two terms he had to continue in office. And so, during seven long years of war and through eight long years of peace that was building up a new nation, he was a leader of the people.

The boy who could give up his desire to go to sea because of his love for his mother became the man who could sacrifice self in the service of his country. But this great general was able to accomplish all that he did in life because in his early youth he had been trained by a wise mother to know that love is greater than self.

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