JOHN TOPP, PIRATE

By Weatherby Chesney and Alick Munro.

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CHAPTER V.

The brig Surrey Hills was engaged in the Venetian trade and did the double voyage twice a year. Her owner was Master Simmonds of the Cheap, and a good servant she had been to him, having fought her way backward and forward between London and Venice against the united forces of wind, waves and picaroons for nearly five and forty years, as the evidence of many a scar on the timbers of her hull and on the faces of her crew could prove.

Our first voyage out was a thoroughly prosperous one. Even the dreaded bay of Biscay was for once as quiet as the most timorous landsman could have wished. Arrived at Venice, we bartered our homely English goods for a cargo of fine glass and iron work from the workshops of the Water City and for curious stuffs and perfumes which its traders had brought from the far lands of Ind, Araby and Cathay.

During the voyage home, too, our luck stuck to us. We had a fair wind not to be so ceremonious, Captain Ireland."

Alec stared with astonishment, but I had recognized the voice.

"Inez!" I cried in delight.

"Ah, you haven't forgotten me, though Alec Ireland has," she said, and I saw that she was glad.

"Forgotten you?" I cried. "No. How could I? But I thought you were in Whitby."

"Apparently it has not been worth your while to inquire. I left Whitby more than a year ago."

"I never heard it."

"Did you ask?"

I was thrown into confusion by her question and was at a loss for a reply, when Alec spoke for me. "We have been at sea ever since we last saw you," he said.

"Ah, then I forgive you!" she replied graciously. "But you must come with me now to my father's house. I don't promise that he will be pleased to see you, but as you are my gallant rescuers he is bound to be polite."

"Don Miguel here, too?" I asked.

"Yes," replied Inez. "You don't suppose I lived alone."

"No, but I thought perhaps there was some one else," I said sadly.

Inez blushed. "Who else?" she asked.

"Your husband!" I ventured.

"I haven't found one yet."

"Then a Whitby lad has a chance?"

"Who knows?"

And again she blushed, and I was just going to say something more when Alec broke in.

"Where were those two men taking you?" he asked.

"I don't know," she answered, with a shudder. "Perhaps to murder me."

"Do you know them?"

"I refused to marry one of them the other day."

"The scoundrel!" I cried savagely. "I wish I'd thrashed him."

"Why, Jack?" she laughed. "He's not the only one who has asked me to be his wife."

"Confound their impudence!" I muttered.

"What?" she cried mischievously. "I seem to have recollections of some one else's impudence, too—at Whitby, for instance. But I suppose you have forgotten."

"Inez," I replied solemnly, "you didn't refuse me—at Whitby?"

"Didn't I? Perhaps it is I who have forgotten then. But come, a truce to this banter. Aren't you going to see me home?"

"Of course we are," said Alec, "and we shall be delighted to renew our acquaintance with Don Miguel, though our last meeting was rather a stormy one, if I remember rightly. How is the alchemy progressing?"

"Oh, he has given that up!"

"In favor of what?"

"Fighting. He's a soldier now."

"H'm," I said, without thinking. "That's an honest trade enough."

Inez laughed gayly.

"And the other is not?" she asked. "I should not have said that."

She looked at me for a minute, with a teasing smile playing round her mouth. Then she held out her hand to me.

"Yes, Jack," she said sweetly; "I do forgive you. You see, I am not quite sure that you were wrong."

And then she began to speak hurriedly of other things.

Our reception by Don Miguel was not a cordial one, but in view of our relations with him in the past it was perhaps hardly to be expected that he would be overjoyed to see us again. Our rescue of Inez from the hands of the ruffians who were carrying her off gave us, however, a claim on his gratitude and an excuse for calling very frequently to see how she was, and as Inez encouraged our visits we took every advantage of the opportunity which chance had given us.

Inez and I had many long walks together through the beautiful country round Vigo Bay, and on those occasions Alec always insisted on marching some 10 or 12 fathoms behind us, for my sweetheart's beauty had won her many admire[illegible] were naturally not inclined t[illegible] quietly to the success of a hereti[illegible]lishman. I had found favor where [illegible] failed, and but for Alec's pre[illegible] vengeful dagger between my ribs would in all probability have been the reward of my wooing.

We saw very little of Don Miguel, but I don't think either Alec or I felt inclined to quarrel with him on that score. I pressed my suit with his daughter, however, and by the time our ship was ready for sea I had won her consent to marry me. I wanted to do so at once, but the Spanish padres refused to peril their souls by celebrating so unholy a union as that of a Spaniard with a heretical Englishman, and neither bribes nor threats would move them.

I had to set off to sea, therefore, without my bride. But we arranged that I was to come back at once to Vigo Bay, when Inez promised to be ready to sail back to England with me. There we hoped the parsons would not be so particular.

CHAPTER VI.

We returned to Vigo Bay in less than four months and with us a large company of other ships, all bearing grain, for which the failure of the Spanish wheat crop promised a profitable market. We neither sold our cargo, however, nor did I succeed in carrying off my sweetheart. And this is how it happened:

Scarcely had we anchored when a negro page came off to the ship in a small boat, bringing me a note from Inez.

She was in sore trouble through her love for me, for Don Miguel had forbidden her to have anything more to do with me and had locked her in her room to make sure that his commands were obeyed. And there was even worse news than this in the letter. Orders, she told me, had been received the whole way, and the words "Trim sails, the watch!" hardly once fell on our ears. Wonderful good fortune, this, but it cost our captain the greater part of his crew, who declared that the ship was bewitched—and I was more than half inclined to agree with them.

This was the reason for their fears: When we were lying at Venice, our captain went to a Finn who dealt in charms and for the sum of 19 ducats bought from him that which would raise a favoring gale. It was wrapped in a skin case marked all over with cabalistic designs whose meaning none of us understood. What it contained I cannot say, for no man on the brig dared to risk his eyesight by gazing at the wizard's charm after its maker had warned him to keep aloof. But this I know, that while that bag was nailed to the masthead we never wanted for a fair wind to waft us home.

Yet there were signs that the Eye above saw with anger the magical device that eased us of the just labors of sea working. Almost every night while we were in the more southern latitudes pale blue lights would fly down to us out of the darkness and perch on yardarm or masthead. They were Corpos Santos—holy bodies—and we knew that they had come to threaten and not to protect, for when we greeted them with a psalm they held their places as though they did not hear a word of our singing.

We younger ones gazed at the omens with wonder and little more, but the older seamen were strangely disquieted, and as soon as we dropped anchor in the Thames and the wages had been paid more than 50 of them left the ship for good. I would have followed them, for I trusted to their older experience in such things, but Alec, as usual, ridiculed my superstition and said he meant to stay, so I had to stifle my qualms and stay too.

We were rewarded for our boldness, for the captain not only appointed us to officerships and housed us in the after house, but undertook to teach us all the mysteries of navigation and seamanship, so that at the end of the voyage we were either of us competent to take the command of a vessel ourselves. And thus in the event it proved that our captain's deal with the devil was the beginning of our rapid rise in the calling we had chosen.

We stuck to the Surrey Hills for several voyages after this, until at last we suffered so much in a brush with a couple of piratical rascals from Sallee that, though we beat them off after a tough battle, the ship was so much knocked about that on our return home she was pronounced unfit for another voyage. And so we were out of a berth. Alec would have shipped from the Thames again for foreign parts at once, but I suggested that we should have a little fun on shore first. We staid a few days, therefore, in London, and then, finding that our money was melting much too fast, we started to walk around the south coast of England.

After a few unimportant adventures we arrived in time at Bristol, and there the emptiness of our purses compelled us to take ship once more. We got berths on board the Severn at Bristol, but our vessel had not got clear of the red waves of the Bristol channel when—opposite Bideford if my memory does not fail me—an accident happened to her which gave us another step up the ladder of fortune. Our captain died of a stroke, and Alec, who had been a deep sea pilot, stepped into his shoes, and I became the second in command. So far, at least, we could not grumble at the way fate had treated us.

Our cargo was a mixed one for Vigo Bay, and after a good voyage out we landed it there and took in Spanish wines in return. While the lading was going on we had plenty of time to spend on shore, and in one of our excursions we had an adventure.

A sailor is always fond of a ride on horseback, and as Alec and I were no exceptions to the rule we had hired a couple of very fair mounts and went for a ride into the country. We had left the town about half a league behind us, when we met a carriage containing two men and a girl. One of the men had his arm round the girl and was holding her fast, as though to prevent her from jumping out, and as we passed she gave a cry and waved her hand to us, whereupon the man who was holding her swore at her and called to the other to whip up his horse.

"Something wrong here, Alec," I exclaimed, but Alec had already turned and was riding hard after him. I followed, and after a chase of about a mile we came up with them. We whipped out our pistols and shouted to them to stop or we would fire.

"Now," said Alec when they had pulled up, "out you get, both of you."

Yielding to the eloquence of the two cocked pistols, they obeyed.

"You with the reins, hold the horse's head. If you move a yard farther on, I shoot. And you other scoundrel, hand the lady out. Quickly, now!"

They were unarmed or at least had no firearms, so they had to do as they were bid. As soon as she was out of the carriage the lady turned and faced the two ruffians with a defiant sneer hovering round her mouth, and they cowered under her glance like whipped curs. Alec made them get in again and drive off at once, daring them to turn their heads as long as they were in pistol shot.

When they were gone, we turned to the lady for an explanation.

"How can I thank you, gentlemen?" she exclaimed.

"Speaks English!" I muttered. "And a pretty girl too! Wonder what those two scoundrels were up to!"

"Madam," said Alec, with a courtly bow, "we are only too glad to have the good fortune to serve you. Where may we have the pleasure of escorting you?"

"Madam!" she laughed. "You need from the court to seize all the English shipping in the bay, to confiscate the cargoes and to imprison the crews. As a captive in the town dungeon I should be farther from her than ever; but, still a free man, I might some day return and carry her off, and so by the love I bore her she entreated me to be gone at once.

Here was a pretty piece of news! We questioned the page, but as he either did not know or would know nothing we sent him off ashore in his boat.

"What are we to do?" asked Alec.

"I'm going ashore," I replied decidedly.

"What for?"

"To rescue Inez."

"Jack, it's useless. You would be arrested long before you reached her."

"I mean to try all the same."

"It'll be foolhardy, I tell you. Much better take the advice she gives you, escape now and come back again to carry her off."

"Alec, I can't go away and leave her in that scoundrel's power. I must go ashore."

Alec shrugged his shoulders. "Well, if you must, you must. I'll go with you, of course, and try to see you safe through, but I quite expect we shall both be locked up for our pains. We will spread the warning among the other English ships on our way."

We went on deck at once and began to lower the boat. We were lying a good two miles farther out than the other ships, so we had a stiff pull before us.

Night was just beginning to fall, and there was some hope that the darkness might cover our movements and enable us to rescue Inez and then slip out of the harbor before the Spaniards had made up their minds to strike. It was a desperate chance, though.

The boat was already on the bulwarks when Alec shouted, "Hold on, all!"

"Too late," he said. "There's a fleet of boats putting out from the shore now, each one crammed full of soldiers. We must leave the other ships to shift for themselves, I'm afraid, and make a bid for our own freedom. That big fellow there, coming up before the wind, seems to have been told off to look after us."

We were well armed, of course, as the most peaceful ship has to be when there are so many sea thieves unhanged, and though the Spanish galleon was five times our size we would have thought nothing of tackling her, five Spaniards to one Englishman being by no means crushing odds, but there were three other ships outside of us evidently waiting to pick up stragglers, so we were to all appearances hopelessly shut in.

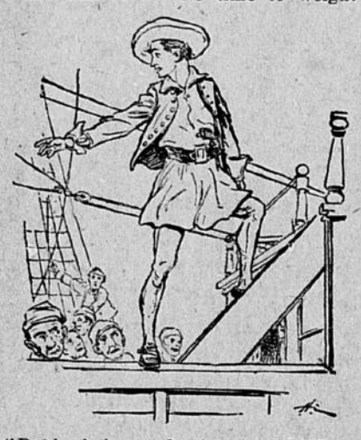
The men looked at one another in consternation.

Alec, however, had made his plan. "Put back the powder," he cried, "and buckle on your side arms. Not a shot must be fired, mind, or we shall have the whole nest of wasps buzzing round our ears. Every man of you take a pike or ax and hide under the bulwarks. We must make that fellow think he has caught us napping."

Our preparations were quickly and quietly made, and long before the big Spaniard was near enough to see what we were doing every man of us was under cover, and the decks looked quite deserted. But when he sheered alongside and hove his grapnels into our rigging Alec gave the word, and with a ringing cheer 50 lusty English lads rushed from their hiding places and were hacking and prodding away among his crew before the unsuspecting Spaniard knew that anything had happened. They were taken completely by surprise, but after the first minute or so they recovered and fought like wildcats. They were about three to our one, so counting one Englishman to five of them the odds in our favor were overwhelming. The Spaniards fought desperately enough until about half of them had been killed, then the rest threw down their arms, called for "quarter" and scrambled down the ladders in utter rout. We clapped the hatches on them, and the big galleon of Spain was ours.

Leaving me with 20 men to take care of our prize (whose sails were all set), Alec tumbled back with the others to our own ship and set about making sail as quickly as he could.

"An ax here and cut the cable!" I heard him call. "No time to weigh!



"Put back the powder," he cried. "Not a shot must be fired."

Let go those spritsail brails! Lay out along the bolt sprit and cast the gaskets off! Flatten in the starboard sheet and cant her head round! Handsomely, now! Topsails next! Work with a will, lads! Time's precious!"

I lost the next words through the distance, and not wishing to slip too far ahead I bagpiped my mizzen, brailed my main course and so allowed Alec to creep up to me again.

He made sail with marvelous quickness and soon was within speaking distance.

"Are your guns all loaded, Jack?"

"Aye, and double shotted and the flint stocks lighted and lying in the tubs beside them."

"Then make straight for that big chap on your larboard bow as if you meant to speak him. Fool him if you can. Say I'm your prize. If he suspects you, give him a broadside for his sharpness. Only keep the wind of him, and you can do what you like. I'll slip across his bow and pepper that side of him. And if that isn't enough do what your mother wit suggests, but mind it must be quickly done whatever it is or we'll have the other two beating up to help him."

Now, had I acted on my opinion I should have steered straight for the open sea, dead before the fair wind, in which case I should inevitably have aroused the suspicions of all three ships and so have allowed them to concentrate on our course and cut us off. Alec's plan was obviously the best, for when they saw I was steering plump for the southernmost one the others held quietly to their places in the mouth of the bay.

When I got within a cable's length, an officer hailed me. I waited as long as I dared and then answered, but apparently there was something wrong with my Spanish, for he replied angrily that I was drunk and an insolent scoundrel for daring so to address him. At this juncture one of my men, a soft hearted fellow, who knew enough of the tongue to make out that the don was using very free language to me, let fly at him with his gun and sent a three ounce ball straight into his breastplate.

That effectually put an end to our diplomacy, so I gave the order to fire as each gun bore. I had warned the gunners to aim high, and at the third shot the Spaniard's maintopmast broke off short like a carrot. His mainyard, too, came down by the run, bringing the sail with it, but as he was still under command I put up past him, reloading the guns meanwhile and then hauling my wind once more gave him a second dose over either quarter.

Meanwhile Alec and his men had been working like furies and tossing their guns about like child's toys, raining such a shower of broken shot into his hull from their lesser elevation that his lower deck must have been almost untenable.

The Spaniard had been unprepared for our attack and took some time to beat his men to quarters, but they served their guns well and fast when they did get to them, and the shot soon came flying about our ears like hailstones. His running rigging, however, was pretty well cut to pieces, and as we had half a dozen good bowmen stationed ready who sent a clothyard shaft through the ribs of every man who set a foot on his ratlines he lay pretty helplessly head to wind, with his remaining sails in the most thorough confusion. Had we been able to play the game out at long bowls we could either have sunk him or reduced the number of his crew sufficiently to allow us to carry him by boarding, but the other two Spanish ships were beating up to us, and on her next tack the nearest would be within gunshot.

Alec therefore gave the word to run away west by south, before the wind, through the southern entrance of the bay. The order did not come a minute too soon, though the majority of us were so worked up by the excitement of the fight that we would never have noticed that it was high time for us to quit.

We held on this course for about two hours, and then, as the sky had fortunately clouded over, we hauled our wind and stood due south to give our pursuers a chance of passing us in the darkness. They would never expect us to turn south, so when they missed us at daylight they would naturally look for us to the northward if they continued the chase. That was our theory. What they actually did I cannot say, for we never saw them again.

We held on this strategic course for a time, and on the second morning rose a brig coming toward us, and as every one at sea is presumed a rogue until he is proved an honest man we cleared the decks for action and beat to quarters. As the stranger neared us one of Alec's men recognized her as the brig Catchall, belonging to Captain Fleming, the well known freebooter. So as he was not likely to let such a vessel as our galleon pass without an overhaul we quite expected another fight. However, he drew within long hail and, bringing his ship to, signed that he wished to speak us.

"What ship's that?"

"The brig Severn of Bristol, Alexander Ireland, master. What ship's that?"

"Brig Catchall, Captain Fleming. What's the galleon?"

"The Lope de Vega of Vigo, a prize to the Severn."

"How the thunder did you get hold of her?"

"Fought for her."

"Then is there war with Spain?"

"I think so."

"You think so?" Then followed some talk with his own people which we could not hear. "Will you lie to and let me bring my boat alongside? I'm honest as the whole bench of bishops today."

"Aye, aye!"

Alec called on me to come on board the Severn, and presently a weather beaten, thickset man of middle age was rowed across to us. We went below and pledged one another in a jack of ale (as the Severn's hold was still filled with wheat instead of the cargo of Spanish wine we had expected to bring back), and then Captain Fleming was told of the seizure and fight in Vigo bay. He listened attentively, nodding his grizzled head at every sentence, but making no remark until he had heard the whole story.

"It was a lucky, plucky escape, captain," he said, looking approvingly at Alec, "and one that does credit to the stuffing of your headpiece. But make no error about its being an affair of unauthorized individuals. It is the beginning of war, I tell you, and a bloody war it will be. I've seen it coming for followed us dimly through the empty passages. Suddenly, with utter disregard of the effect that his vocal efforts would have on a sleeping household, one of them began to sing, but our window shutter made such a din, rattling in the wind, that we could not distinguish much of the song beyond the lilt, which, however, sounded strangely familiar.

Alec went and made the shutter secure, so that the second verse came to us distinctly:

Sail away,
Hack away,
Plunder! [Rap.]
Gather all the valuables you can.
Come back,
Nothing lack,
Thunder! [Rap.]
Scatter all the money like a man.

The singer repeated this verse time after time, and the other man joined in an occasional chorus, while both, so far

The man on the table slewed around.

as we could judge by the sound, were beating a vigorous accompaniment with their fists on the hard oak table. The song was a common enough one among mariners, but there was no mistaking the rasping tones of that sawlike voice.

"It's Willie Trehalion!" cried Alec and rushed to the door. I followed, and, scrambling down our ladder again, we made for the kitchen.

"Art lying, nephew?" we heard the older man ask as we approached.

"No, uncle—sober truth," replied the one with the scar.

"You always was a vagabond, Job."

"Like you, uncle."

By this time we had reached the door and saw that the skin cap was now lying on the table, and an iron hook was thoughtfully scratching that same bald, shot shaped head which had excited our admiration in the old Whitby days.

"What cheer, Willie Trehalion?" sang out Alec.

The man on the table slewed around, dropped to the ground, knuckled his forehead, said "Bravely, my masters," and, without showing the least surprise at seeing us, asked us how we did.

"Well," I said, "and prosperous, both of us. But surely that can't be Nep?" and I pointed to a gaunt, black cat that had slid from Willie's lap when he jumped off the table and now stood with its back arched and its tail like a furze bush, spitting and glaring at us with a most evil look.

"Aye, but it is. Been with me ever since an remembers you both. I see he does. Go an give the gentlemen your duty, Nep."

The cat, who never disobeyed a command from his master, came and rubbed his shaggy sides against our legs in greeting.

"It's Nep, sure enough," said Alec, "though rather more age battered and scar torn than he was. And this is your nephew, Willie?"

"Yes, sirs; Job Trehalion, my nephew, an a gracious rogue."

Job grinned and saluted.

"Where have you been wandering, Willie, this long time?" I asked after we had thus formally made the acquaintance of the man with the scar.

"Spanish main, master, with Captain Andrew Dove. Brought up at Bideford eight days since."

"Made a good voyage of it?"

"So, so. Missed the plate ship we went a'ter, but picked up a tidy caravel an half a dozen smaller fry. Naught much to complain on, save lack o' sound liquor, an that did run uncommon short. I tell 'ee we was put to supping that thin sour vinegar stuff them dons fancies. Nep ain't got over it yet."

"Tell the gentles what I told 'ee about Manoa, uncle," put in Job.

"Hold your meddling tongue, Job!" said Willie angrily. "They knows about it already, an didn't Captain Ireland's own father lose his life seeking for it?"

Job grinned and said perseveringly, "Tell about the pagan."

Willie Trehalion waved his hook with a gesture of dissent and said nothing. But my curiosity was aroused. "Come, Willie," I said. "Wha[illegible] about the pagan?"

"Take no notice o' what Job says is usual, masters; he's but one peg re[illegible]moved from being a natural."

Job grinned.

"There!" cried Willie. "Look at[illegible] an judge for yourselves! But a[illegible] the pagan. We catched an Indi[illegible] brown colored varmint with no [illegible] clothes on him than there is on a [illegible] spike—an brought him along wit[illegible]

"Well?" said I, seeing by J[illegible] that there was something mo[illegible]

"Well, if you must know, o[illegible] age home he was sullen an [illegible] stockfish, but once here he [illegible] tongue an, speaking in scrap[illegible] he picked up among us, s[illegible] we'll take him back he'll [illegible] that goulden city I tell y[illegible] Whitby. Says as he was [illegible] That's all."

"Tell about the goulden [illegible]cle," persisted Job, wit[illegible]leer, "an tell how the p[illegible] his fingers with a burn[illegible] drawed a picture chart [illegible] this year or more. Shi[illegible] gathered into all the por[illegible] nobles are chartering ves[illegible] purposes than honest tra[illegible] free cruising. King Phi[illegible] will make a big move [illegible] Mark my words, sir."

"England will be ready [illegible] he does," replied Alec pro[illegible]

"Aye, lad, I warrant [illegible] it's time she was stirring [illegible]iards—curse the whole n[illegible]—will be cruising about [illegible] channel and up to Londo[illegible] any of us are many n[illegible] Now, Captain Ireland," [illegible] standing up and beating his [illegible] table in time with his sent[illegible] a freebooter and an o[illegible] though there's many an [illegible] would be glad to hear that [illegible] I love my country with t[illegible] them. So when you get b[illegible] spread the news of this thr[illegible] vasion and say that a warni[illegible] brought when Philip's arma[illegible] and that I am the man wh[illegible] it. And may God keep m[illegible] on sentry go about the s[illegible] crack of doom if I fail [illegible] watch over England's safet[illegible]

And he brought his fist [illegible] the table with a crack tha[illegible] ale pots dance.

"Pardon me, captain," s[illegible] We honor you for those words, [illegible] I'd like to remind you of one thing—Franky Drake will hang you if he gets his fingers on your shoulder. I have heard him say so."

"Master Topp," he replied, looking at me steadily, "if I can save England by my news I don't mind if I swing for the bringing of it, and you can say so from me to any one that asks."

We gave Captain Fleming a ringing cheer as he stepped into the boat. A watch had been stationed to guard the honor of England, and it was a common pirate who went on sentry go.

But pirate though he was he was a patriot too. May England never have any lack of such sturdy sons as Captain Fleming, freebooter!

(To be Continued)

Denison, Iowa, Nov. 27

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