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JOHN TOPP, PIRATE.

By WEATHERBY CHESNEY and ALICK MUNRO.

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covered under her glance like whipped cubs. 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.

"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 not 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 Whitley."

"Apparently it has not been worth your while to inquire, I left Whitley 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 Whitley had 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 Whitley, for instance. But I suppose you have forgotten."

"Inez," I replied solemnly, "you didn't refuse me—at Whitley?" "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 admirers, who were naturally not inclined to submit quietly to the success of a heretical Englishman. I had found favor where they had failed, and but for Alec's precaution a venal 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 permit 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 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 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 unhanding, 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 grapples 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 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! Let go those spritsail brails! Lay out along the bolt sprit and cast the gaskets and cast her head round! Hand-somely, 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 bagged my mizzen, brailled 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 flat 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 effectively 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 mainmast 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 halting 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 through the ribs of every man who set a foot on his rattles 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.

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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 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 haul 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, thickest 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 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 this year or more. Ships are being gathered into all the ports, and great numbers are chartering vessels for other purposes than honest trade or a little free cruising. King Philip of Spain will make a big move before long. Mark my words, sir."

"England will be ready for him when he does," replied Alec proudly. "Aye, lad, I warrant she will, but it's time she was stirring, or the Spaniards—curse the whole nation of them—will be cruising about the English channel and up to London town before any of us are many months older. Now, Captain Ireland," he continued, standing up and beating his fist on the table in time with his sentences, "I'm a freebooter and an outlaw; but, though there's many an Englishman

weak, run-down and falling off in flesh and looks, the root of the trouble can be traced to womanly diseases which undermine the general health. The proof of this is that women who have been cured of painful womanly diseases by the use of Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription have recovered their general health, gained in flesh and in appearance.

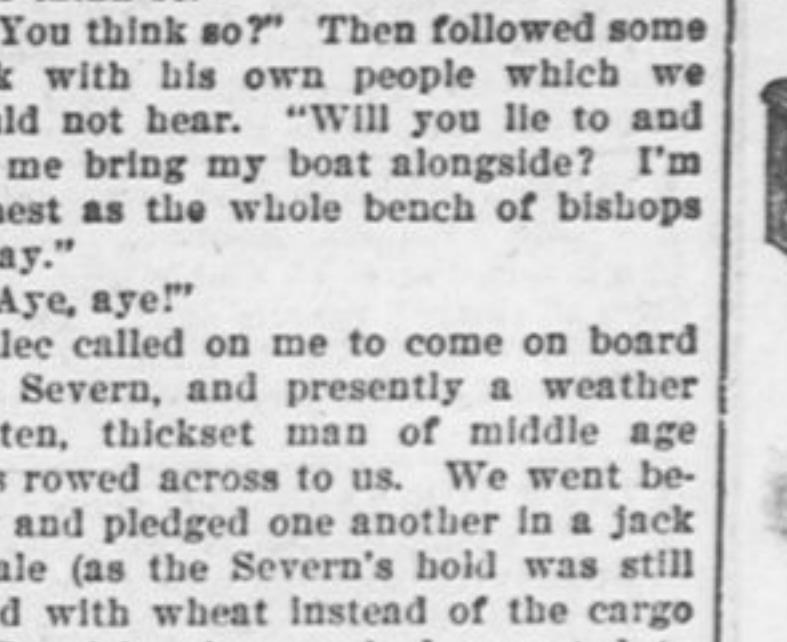
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THE WEEKLY POST, LINDSAY, FRIDAY, JULY 8, 1900.

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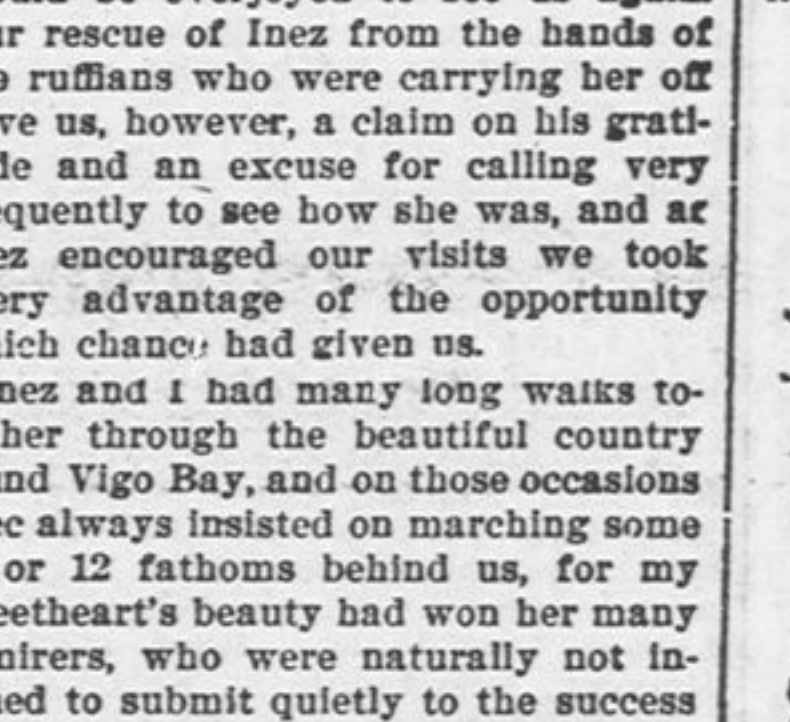
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