

MYSTERY ISLAND

A Thrilling Tale of Adventure in Unknown Seas

By a Popular Author.



THE 1st CHAPTER

A Dramatic Meeting—The Lost Ship—The Anchor's Waiver

LONDON was at lunch; the streets in the business and commercial quarters were filled with a seething crowd of all sorts and conditions of people, freed for one brief hour from the toil and worry of the office and shop; and in every establishment devoted to the supply of refreshments, waiters and waitresses had braced themselves for "the rush."

No less busy than its neighbours, a little unpretentious, yet cosy and expensive restaurant in one of the streets near Charing Cross which run down from the Strand to the river, was struggling in the throes of "the rush." Waiters bowed crepe messages through the speaking-tube which doubtless led to the mysterious regions below; others raced to and fro with piles of dishes, in a manner which might have turned any ordinary juggler green with envy. The odours of a score of different dishes was wafted now and again through the place, as fresh supplies were sent up on the little elevator.

Scarcely a seat was vacant at the tables, and it seemed as if every man there had but one object in life—to finish his meal and get out. But in one corner, at a table large enough to accommodate six people, only two men were seated, both of whom appeared to be thinking of anything but the food before them.

Athletic in appearance, bronzed, and well dressed, they presented a striking appearance. The face of each was frank and open, and the features so similar that one might have been excused for presuming them to be brothers.

At every other bite they glanced up furtively at each other, with a kind of puzzled expression. Then, their eyes meeting, one dropped his fork and knife upon his plate with a clatter, and leaped further over the table, peering into the face of the other, who had suddenly stopped eating and was returning the gaze with interest.

"Rick Hearn, or I'm a Dutchman!"

Ted Howard!

Two pairs of hands shot across the table and met in a firm grip of friendship, and they shook there so long over the plates that a waiter who had been watching them, found himself in a serious dilemma as to whether it would not be expedient to inform the manager that "them two swell coves in the corner 'ad gone off their heads, sir, and would 'e call in the place!"

However, he was mercifully released from this position, and admitted to himself that "it's a pair of swells all right," when Rick and Ted, having recovered from the pleasant surprise of meeting, had subsided into a rational demeanour.

"To think that after all these years we should meet again!" cried Ted.

"Why, we were little kids at Bolden's Academy when we saw each other last. Don't you remember, Rick, how—"

And a full half-hour's reminiscences of the old school life followed, of their joys, petty sorrows, their pranks, their ambitions, and their determinations to follow all kinds of professions when grown up, each of which were to bring both fame and wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.

Of boys they had known. How clever young Digby was a clerk at two o'clock a week. How Jones, the dunce, had made a fortune in the

coal business. How Watson, who declared his life would only be tolerable in the Army, where deeds of daring-do might be committed by him to the astonishment of the world and glory of his country, was at that moment quietly conducting a first-class butcher's business, as being the most bloodthirsty profession a man of four-foot-nine could shine in. How this, how that. The restaurant was empty ere they left for Ted's chambers in the Adelphi.

"Now, look here, Rick, my boy," said Ted, as they settled down to cigars and cool drinks. "Now that we have run across each other again, I don't intend to lose sight of you. Therefore, as I am just about to go for a cruise in my new yacht, the Seamew, you've got to come with me."

A perceptible shudder passed over Rick Hearn, and his face became clouded as he answered, in a sad tone which contrasted strikingly with his previous gaiety:

"I can't, Ted, old chap. I'd go to the ends of the earth with you, you know, but not if it entailed a sea-voyage. No, don't stop me"—as Ted was about to interrupt—"let me get it over quickly, and never refer to it again. Two years ago, my poor old dad, with his ship, the Orinoco, was lost in the Pacific Ocean. The shock of the news nearly turned my brain, and I have never been able to look at the sea since without a terrible feeling of sorrow. Don't renew the subject, please."

But Ted was not to be so easily thwarted.

"And let you go melancholy mad," he said. "I should be a true chum to do that—now wouldn't I? Look here, Rick, I've made up my mind you're coming, and I never unmake my mind."

At first Rick refused to listen, but gradually Ted's wiser counsels prevailed, and as he saw he was making headway, he added the one clincher necessary to his argument.

"Besides," he concluded, "you say it was only two years ago your father was lost, and that he was trading with the natives of some almost unknown islands, out of the beaten track of ships. Well, before giving way to despair, did it not strike you to hope?"

"What can I hope?"

"Why, that the Orinoco has foundered among these islands, the whole crew landed, and unable as yet to communicate with the civilized world!"

"You think that feasible?" asked Rick, starting up from his seat. "You really believe there is hope?"

"As an amateur kind of seaman, I do believe so," said Ted. "And, if you'll only agree to it, we'll go straight off to the owners of the Orinoco and obtain a rough idea of where the vessel was supposed to be found. Then, with that information in our pocket, Rick, my boy"—slapping him on the back, and gripping his hand in a hearty shake—"and hol' for the Eastern seas, to find the missing skipper! Say you'll go—now, will you?"

"I will, Ted; and a thousand heartfelt thanks to you for the new hope you've given me, and for your promised help in the search for my poor dad!"

"Well, well," said Ted, waving off the thanks. "I'm glad I've made you see sense, anyway. Rick, now, I've got a plan of procedure whereby our task will be much lightened."

"Tell me," said Rick, brightening.

"We will take aboard the Seamew

a cargo of cheap Brummagem jewelry, beads, etc., and trade with the natives. In that way we will not only stand a much better chance of hearing news of the lost Orinoco and crew, but we will make a substantial profit on the trip."

Rick was delighted, and not until they parted at midnight did they stop for one moment talking over the projected trip and the prospects of success.

On the following day Rick and Ted repaired together to the offices of Matthew Blake—the owner of the ill-fated Orinoco—in Leadenhall Street. Mr. Blake was in, and in a more aggressive and disagreeable mood than Rick had ever before seen him. Within the memory of his oldest clerk, Matthew Blake never had been affable, but on this particular morning he was in a terrible mood.

"Well," he said, "Rick and Ted were ushered in. 'What can I do for you? State your business briefly and quickly, for I'm busy. Come, what is it?'"

"Our business can be stated very briefly," said Ted coolly, "and can be speedily disposed of, Mr. Matthew Blake. The gentleman is the son of Captain Hearn, of the Orinoco, and he and I wish to look over the chart of that ill-fated vessel's route. That is all."

"Oh, he banged!" snapped Blake. "The thing went down a couple of years ago, and the matter is closed."

"Still, you have the chart," persisted Ted.

"And suppose I tell you I won't show it, and that you may go and mind your own business?"

"In that case I have two remarks to make to you, Mr. Matthew Blake. Firstly, it is your business. Secondly—Lord's! Now, come. Be reasonable, and don't put us to further trouble than is necessary, or coffin-ship owner as you are, I'll—"

"Enough, enough!" cried Blake. "It was not my intention to betray a gentleman into degrading himself with such language. I am a respectable man. I apologise if I was hasty, and hope you will also—"

"I am sorry," began Ted, when Blake cut him short with:

"Well, well, least said, soonest mended. You shall have the chart, and if you can only discover the Orinoco and earn the salvage, you will be welcome to it."

As he spoke, Matthew Blake went to a safe, and took therefrom a piece of folded parchment, which he handed to Ted Howard.

"Thank you, Mr. Blake," said Ted. "I—"

Rap—rap—rap!

He was interrupted by a series of knuckle knocks on the door, following close upon which a stout, ruficund individual, with a smiling face, and wearing seafaring garb, entered.

"Matthew Blake, ahoy!" he cried cheerily, pulling his forelock. "Ben Bowline's outen a ship."

"And what the dickens has that to do with me, you leading lumbung?" roared Blake. "How dare you bounce into my private room thus, and interrupt me when I am—"

"Pardon, sir; no harm meant. Only want a ship, sir. You know Ben Bowline, sir. Don't be offended."

"Offended!" Blake almost screamed the word, as, putting his hands on his desk, he stood up, leaned forward, and glared at the intruder.

"Confound you, sir! Get out of my office. And be hanged to you for an incompetent ne'er-do-well!"

"You'll excuse me, Mr. Blake," retorted Bowline, "but I've got good discharges from every vessel I've bin aboard, and though I sail as mate, I holds a master's certificate, and—"

Ere the sailor could finish his sentence, Matthew Blake, in a paroxysm of rage, hurled a heavy metal inkstand full at his face.

With an adroit movement the sailor threw himself forward, allowing the missile to pass harmlessly over his head and smash, with a loud crash, upon the lintel of the door beyond. In another second he had disappeared through the door, and, thoroughly disgusted with the behaviour of the shipowner—and having the required chart in their possession—Ted and Rick left the office, with a searful murmur, "good day."

At the foot of the stairs Ben Bowline was standing, chuckling to himself, and looking the very personification of good-humour, notwithstanding the disagreeable experience through which he had just passed.

"The master was somewhat curt," said Ted, in passing.

"Curt! He's the most evil-minded brute ever a man had to work for," said Bowline, his brow darkening. "Curse him! One of these days—"

"Never mind about revenge," said Ted quickly. "I know he's a scoundrel and deserves all you think of him. But I believe your main object in visiting him was to obtain a berth. You are a mate, I understand."

"Cap'n, sir?"

"Still, you'd take a mate's berth?"

"I would, sir; and be thankful for it."

"Then call on me to-morrow morn-

ing at ten o'clock, and I'll formally engage you as mate of the Seamew," said Ted. "Here is my card."

And without another word the chums left the jolly sailorman, and made their way to Ted's lodgings, where Rick had taken up his quarters.

On the following day, Ben Bowline duly put in an appearance, was engaged, and, when the cargo of Brummagem was safely stowed in the hold, the Seamew set sail for the Pacific Islands, where a small fortune was to be made, and where Rick Hearn was to seek his father.

THE 2nd CHAPTER

An Ocean Mystery—Mutiny Aboard—The Mutineer's Legacy

"It is a mystery to me. Cannot you suggest some solution, Ted?"

Rick Hearn and Ted Howard were conversing in gloomy tones, as they leaned idly over the taffrail of the Seamew, whose clean-cut bows were ploughing through the placid blue waters of the Pacific. Both chums looked more than usually anxious, and Ted's brow was knit in deep thought.

"It is beyond me," he said. "According to the calculations made by Captain Bunce and myself, we should have made the Tropic of Capricorn and sighted the islands south of it ten days ago. Yet, here we are, unblinded, unscathed anywhere, and not one of us knows where we are or where we are likely to put in."

"Davy Jones's locker, I should say, unless we strike lucky and regain our bearings," said Rick thoughtfully. "But it is not that only which worries me, Ted; it is the fact that the crew, like that of Columbus, when he didn't find America quick enough to please 'em, are getting more and more discontented every day. Unless some definite statement as to when we shall do so, I fear there will be a mutiny."

"Nonsense!" returned Ted. "I'd like to see the crew that dared to mutiny while Ben Bowline was second in command. Why, bless you, Rick, in spite of his jolly face and hearty nature, Ben Bowline is a dozen Captain Kestles rolled into one for keeping men in order."

"I only hope it is so," said Rick dubiously. "Meanwhile, all I've got to say is that I wish I was well out of this mess. I've missed the main object for which I visited these parts, and all my hope in that direction is gone, as we have discovered no trace of my father. I must conclude that the wreck has happened."

A long silence ensued, during which the chums puffed heavily at their cigars, and contemplated the vast waste of sea around them. At last Ted said:

"We shall be pretty rich when we get home, Rick, even if we don't do another single deal. The stuff we've bartered at the islands we've already called at has brought in a decent sum for us."

"Still, you'd take a mate's berth?"

"I would, sir; and be thankful for it."

"Then call on me to-morrow morn-

ing. Instinctively Ted divined his chum's thoughts, and glided silently away, to enjoy the remainder of his cigar, and to talk over the situation with Captain Bunce in the latter's state-room. For some time Rick stood stock still, then, from force of habit, glancing at his revolver to assure himself of its readiness for service, he wandered forward, muttering strangely to himself.

Just then Captain Bunce came on deck, and was making his way to the bridge when, just as he was about to place his foot upon the steps, a heavy marble spike was hurled at him from above.

The missile grazed his sleeve, and striking the deck, rebounded clean over the bulwarks into the sea.

"What swab flung that marble spike?" roared Bunce, as he leapt to the bridge and came face to face with jolly Ben Bowline. "Confound it, Bowline, I—"

"Well, now, koshalk me for a fool of a son of a seaboard!" cried Bowline, aghast. "I hope that marble never bit you, sir!"

"You hope so do you? You lubber!" roared Captain Bunce. "What did you fling it for?" he thundered.

"Gently, skipper, easy! Stand by now," said Bowline apologetically. "Some swab had left that spike up here, and I meaner shunt it into the sea. I never seed you comin'." If I



From the centre of the island a mighty column of flame and molten earth shot up. From that moment "Mystery Island" ceased to exist.

tremendous about west up from the island, which the voyagers had hitherto imagined to be uninhabited, and almost simultaneously they were riven with the beating of a hundred tom-toms as over a thousand queer-looking natives rushed out from concealment into the open, and then stood stock still, in evident amazement, gazing at the yacht.

All hands assembled forward, to eagerly scrutinize the curious crowd, and revolvers were hurriedly served out in case of a hostile demonstration on the part of the natives. The latter were diminutive in stature, not one being bigger than the average English child of ten; their heads were large and intellectual in appearance; they wore peculiar costumes, made evidently from leaves sewn together with fibre; and these were lavishly adorned with some of the most wonderful precious stones set in gold that the chums had ever set eyes on. The spears they carried had bejewelled handles, and were tipped with the precious metal.

It would be difficult to judge which party were most astonished, the natives or the voyagers. For some time there was dead silence, then, as one of the pigmies stepped out and flung something aboard the yacht, Ted's face lit up.

"You need have no fear," he said, as he picked up the object, which turned out to be a massive gold anklet set with a huge fortune in diamonds. "I have had more experience among unknown and savage tribes than most men, and have no hesitation in taking this as a sign that we are to be received in a friendly way."

The others crowded round and gazed in open-mouthed wonder at the precious bauble.

"Great Scott!" said Rick. "This seems like a page out of an Arabian Nights tale. What if they'll only let us land we should be able to bring away enough to make every man-jack of us multi-millionaires for life. Wealth beyond the dreams of avarice sounds paltry to this!"

"Of course they'll let us land," said Ted. "They're as friendly as if they'd known us for years."

Ted went ashore alone, first, and returned with some of the most gorgeously dressed of the tribe, returning half an hour later with the intelligence that the pigmies actually spoke a little broken English.

The chart and marine-books were referred to, and it was discovered that such an island as this was supposed to exist, but that the supposition was regarded as mere sailors' speculation. Up to the present no one had found it.

Seeing at a glance how the mouths of the crew watered at the sight of the wealth evident on every hand on the island, Ted hit upon a novel plan and put it into immediate execution. Giving each of the men two sacks, one containing a quantity of Brummagen jewellery, and the other empty, he instructed them to walk about the island as if what mattered was the gold. Whatever gold or precious stones they could obtain in exchange for the worthless baubles with which they had been supplied, they had full permission to keep for themselves. So much delight aboard one single ship had never before existed, and the men eagerly began their bargaining, while Ted, Rick, and Captain Hearn went off to fetch, each carrying two large sacks, intent upon profit and pleasure.

The natives, all of whom, for some mysterious reason as yet unascertained, could make themselves understood in English tolerably well, were laboriously polite and exceedingly friendly. They showed themselves willing to conduct the white men about, show them everything possible, and to exchange their rudely-made baubles for the better finished but worthless Brummagen goods.

The chums could not help noticing that there was no sign of any animate thing save human on the island. Not the slightest trace of any animal, bird, or insect was to be discovered. This fact seemed to give Ted cause for gloomy thought, but he wisely restrained from communicating his thoughts to his companions.

In less than a couple of hours, the trio had "sold out," and, laden with enough wealth to buy several large towns, they made their way back to the ship, followed by scores of natives who carried great burdens of golden articles and diamond ornaments, and who insisted upon seeing about to make exchange for things which, to their eyes, were twenty times more beautiful.

Ted and Rick were nothing loth, and until dusk they worked like Trojans, distributing cheap brooches, rings, and novelties, and receiving in

exchange rudely-made articles of gold set with wonderful stones. By dusk their entire stock was gone, and it was with difficulty they persuaded the little natives to leave the vessel. Many, in their disgust at not being able to do more business, flung their gold and jewels on the deck, declaring brokenly that they were not worth taking away.

The Seamew's cargo was now probably the most precious that had ever floated, not excepting the Spanish galleons of old and the treasure-ships of ancient pirates. The Seamew returned to the ship in high feather, each one bearing a sack of gold and diamonds as heavy as he cared to carry.

These were all sealed up by Ted and Rick, and deposited in the hold with the rest of the cargo, each sack bearing a label showing the name of the owner, and it was agreed that this should be the men's share of the proceeds, each one to receive his own special sack of wealth when the Seamew should put into English port. No distinction was made between the ex-mutineers and the others; and, with the true generosity of the typical British tar, the loyalists never dreamt of suggesting any difference. The completest harmony reigned, and every one was more than satisfied. All discipline was relaxed now, and until the early hours of the morning the sailors lounged about the deck, snaking wonderful plans for the future when they should return to England, not as common sailors, but as men of wealth.

On the following morning Ted Howard and Rick Hearn went ashore again, with the intention of studying the island—which was some hundreds of square miles in extent—and the natives.

On all hands strange vegetation and queer earth-structure met their eyes, and as they passed through each little hamlet they could not help noticing that everything of metal was made of gold. The island was intersected with scores of rapid, little, shallow streams, and, upon examining these, the chums found that the sandy beds were fairly glittering with gold-dust and tiny nuggets ranging in size from a pin-head to a pea.

What puzzled them, most, however, was the fact that, although, as far as was known, this place—which they had never before been visited by an Englishman, the natives seemed to know the language.

The mystery was soon to be solved. During their explorations they met the gorgeously-bedecked pigmy who had flung the peace-offering on to the deck of the "Seamew," and the little fellow's face was the picture of anxious perplexity.

"What's the matter, old chap?" queried Ted.

"Very much bad. White chief—he go near die."

The chums started. "White chief?" exclaimed Rick breathlessly. "What do you mean? Where is he?" "We did not know you had a chief."

He blurted out the words incoherently. "So your chief is ill," said Ted. "Lead us to him. We may perhaps be able to do him good."

"Come, whites," was the only reply the little fellow made as he plunged into a thicket, and, striking a trodden path led the way along it until it led into the most beautiful dell the chums had ever seen. On the opposite side stood a large log cabin, and for this their little guide made.

Two of the tallest natives on the

island, spears in hand, stood on guard at the door; but they stepped aside, and allowed the trio to enter. The interior of the cabin was in semi-darkness, and the chums, as they followed their conductor in, could just perceive the form of a white man, in a ragged European dress, and with a flowing white beard, lying on a rude couch in a corner of the room.

They stood still, at a little distance from the figure, while the pigmy advanced to the couch and endeavoured to awake the sleeper. While he was thus engaged, the chum's eyes grew more accustomed to the gloom, and they could now plainly see the features of the white man on the couch as, awaking from his slumbers, he turned his face towards them.

"Father!" Rick fairly screamed the word, and the next instant he was shaking the invalid's hand wildly.

To describe that dramatic meeting between Rick and his father would be impossible. It was a full hour ere they ceased repeating each other's names, uttering congratulations, thanks, and declarations of their happiness.

[What rejoiced Rick most was that his father's complaint was merely grief and melancholy, and his arrival had cured it like magic. When at length they emerged from the cabin together, and joined Ted—who had discreetly retired—Mr. Hearn was as well as possible, and the little pigmy ran off to tell his brethren that the white chief who had come in the big canoe were magicians.]

It was with some difficulty that the little fellows were induced to take leave of their white chief when he essayed to board the yacht; but at length, on his promising to return some day, they were pacified; and, amid a thunder of tom-toms and a mighty shouting, the two chums and the white chief were allowed to row to the yacht's side in a gig.

Orders were promptly given to weigh anchor—for Ted feared the natives might at the last moment want their chief back again—the engines were started, and, with a hearty British cheer from the crew, the Seamew stood out to sea at full steam.

"Thank goodness, we're well away from Mystery Island!" said Ted, as the yacht glided away. "I'd as soon stand on the side of an active volcano. Take my word for it, Rick, there'll be a slap-up earthquake there in about

Rumble-rumble-rumble!

Like the sound of distant thunder it came. Suddenly the sea around them rose in angry waves. The yacht was pitched about like a cork; and, looking landward, they could see the ground rocking as if it were liquid.

Then from the centre of the island a mighty column of flame and molten earth shot up hundreds of feet into the air. Then came a sound as of a million pieces of ordnance being discharged, and Mystery Island sank beneath the angry waves, never again to be seen by the eye of mortal man.

Every soul aboard the Seamew was awed by the grandeur and magnitude of the occurrence. It was a sight for the gods. Not a lip was there but quivered at the thought of the doom that had been spared them.

In a sea of boiling surf the island disappeared; then as suddenly as the waves had risen they subsided, and the prow of the Seamew was pointed to England.

"As near a shave of being wrecked as ever I've had!" muttered Ted, as he led Rick and his father below. "Come, we'll steady our nerves, and trouble Captain Hearn for his story."

THE 4th CHAPTER. Homeward Bound—The Exile's Narrative—Unmasked—Conclusion.

SEATED around the dining-table, before a sumptuous repast, Rick and general Captain Bunce were burning to hear the narrative of the ex-white chief of Mystery Island, but Ted forbade it until the meal was disposed of, and the four were comfortably settled to wine and cigars afterwards. Then, Captain Hearn—who, after a visit to the ship's barber and the wardrobe, looked himself again—was about to begin, when he caught sight of Rick's ring.

"Where did you get that?" he asked eagerly. "It was given me by a man who he killed in a mutiny aboard this vessel."

"His name?" "Ben Bowline."

"Description?" Rick gave it.

"He is the man," said Captain Hearn. "But, stay, I am anticipating. I shall have something to say about that ring presently, Rick. Listen!"

"It is nearer three than two years since I set sail for the Pacific Islands with the Orinoco, belonging to Matthew Blake, and which I so-called 'scamp' named Ben Bowline aboard. That villain, after a successful cruise, trading with natives, stirred up mutiny, with the result that the ship was taken by the crew. The scoundrels robbed me of all my personal possessions, including that ring which you wear, Rick, and set me adrift in an open boat, with one week's provisions. How I lived through that terrible week I shall never know. At all events, when my provisions had run out, and I was starving, I sighted land. None too soon. Scarce had I set eyes upon the dark streak on the horizon ere I fainted, and when I recovered consciousness it was to find myself in the midst of a howling crowd of pigmies."

"To cut a long story short, they were more than friendly. They almost worshipped me, and made me their chief. I have, as far as physical comfort was concerned, had all one's heart could wish for while on the island; and, as the natives—who were just about twenty times more intellectual than the average white man—quickly picked up my language, I found no difficulty on that score. But the solitude, the knowledge that you, Rick, were mourning me as dead—the intense longing to see a white face, to hear a countryman's voice, began to tell on me, and I should have had a complete nervous breakdown had you not turned up when you did."

Such was Captain Hearn's story in a nutshell, simple enough at first blush; but it set both Ted and Rick thinking deeply; and, long after the others had retired for the night, they sat in their deck-chairs aft, earnestly discussing it in low tones from behind the two bright points' light at their feet.

"I think you ought to do it," Ted said emphatically. "The man's dead, and what we do now cannot make the slightest difference to him, although it may make a deal to us, and—and someone."

Rick seemed hard to convince upon the point, but at last yielded, and the chums repaired to Rick's cabin, where the mysterious packet left by Ben Bowline was opened and the documents it contained duly perused.

The main enclosure was a full confession of the dead macraent's mis-

deeds, while the others contained letters which, if they were perused in an English court of law, would condemn another man at present living.

First thing on the morning following, the mysterious document enclosures were laid before Captain Hearn, and for the rest of the day the crew were at a loss to understand why Rick and his father were so particularly high spirited. Likewise they were puzzled to guess the reason Ted suddenly ordered the ship to be re-painted, the name changed to Curlew, and several other alterations made in the appearance of the yacht.

"There," said Ted, when the alterations had been completed, "if there's any shipping intelligence about the arrival of a y. Seamew before we get it ourselves in Leadenhall Street, London, you call me the longest longshoreman that ever breathed!"

Next day the Seamew berthed amongst a forest of masts in the West India Dock.

Ted determined to unload, and with all possible speed her cargo was transferred to a Lombard Street bank, including the sailors' shares, which he refused to let them touch for a few days, well knowing how quickly they would lose their newly-acquired wealth were they allowed to take it away at once.

All this having been arranged, a little party of four, consisting of Captain Bunce and Hearn, with Ted, Howard and Rick, chartered a four-wheeler, and were driven with all speed to Aldgate Pump, where they alighted and made their way to the offices of Matthew Blake, shipowner, Leadenhall Street. Leaving the others in the corridor, Rick entered the office, and, after the usual preliminaries, was admitted into the presence of the shipowner.

"I have come to inquire," he said, "whether you can give me any further information regarding the fate of my father's ship, the Orinoco."

"Sunk," said Mr. Blake. "That's all I know. What the dickens do you mean by coming here and wasting my time with such foolish questions? I had almost forgotten the whole matter."

"But I had not," retorted Rick. "And there are others whose memories are as good. I want you to tell me all you know."

"I have told you that your father and all the crew went down with her. You're sure she was down?" Rick glanced keenly at the other as he spoke, and Blake winced. Then he flew into a terrible passion, and, ordering Rick out, he opened the door, only to come face to face with Captain Hearn and his two friends.

Then followed a dramatic scene as, with Ben Bowline's confession and other proofs displayed, Captain Hearn related how Blake had been in the habit of sending out ships, heavily insured, with Bowline as mate, the latter's duty being to stir up mutiny, kill the captain, and seize the ship.

Those vessels, it appeared, were at once re-painted, re-christened, and sent for a small foreign port, and there sold, the proceeds being divided amongst the crew, and the insurance going to Blake. The Orinoco had been one of these, and Ben Bowline had sailed on the Seamew with his old purpose, but in that case Blake was to divide the price the vessel would have fetched had the mutiny succeeded.

At the conclusion of the indictment, Matthew Blake, who before his lifelong imprisonment, turned ashy pale, the hunted look in his eyes changed to one of terrible desperation, and as Rick and Ted moved towards him he sprang from his seat, dashed across the room, and, with a flying leap, went through the window, carrying glass and sash with him.

The chums did their best to stop him, but too late. When they peered him up, a few minutes later, Matthew Blake was dead.

A tremendous fortune, which was equally divided between Captain Bunce and Hearn, Rick and Ted, was realised from the proceeds of the Mystery Island expedition, and Ted saw to it personally that the share of every other member of the crew was so invested as to make each individual rich for life.

There is nothing to darken Rick's brow now, and it would be impossible to find in the four quarters of the globe four men who are happier than Ted Howard, Captain Bunce, Captain Hearn, and his son Rick, who, after having been moaned dead, he was lazariously in splendid solitude as the white chief of "Mystery Island."

THE END.

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