

Chapter 1

The Sound of the Shell

The boy with fair hair lowered himself down the last few feet of rock and picked his way toward the lagoon. Though he had taken off his school sweater, his grey shirt stuck to him and his hair was plastered to his forehead. All round him the long scar smashed into the jungle. He was clambering heavily among the creepers and broken trunks when a bird flashed upwards with a witch-like cry.

"Hi!" it said. "Wait a minute!" The undergrowth at the side of the scar was shaken. "Wait a minute," the voice said. "I got caught up. I can't hardly move with all these creeper things."

The owner of the voice came backing out of the undergrowth. The naked crooks of his knees were plump, caught and scratched by thorns. He was shorter than the fair boy and very fat. He came forward and looked up through thick spectacles.

"Where's the man with the megaphone?"

The fair boy shook his head. "This is an island. At least I think it's an island. That's a reef out in the sea. Perhaps there aren't any grownups anywhere."

The fat boy looked startled. "There was that pilot. But he wasn't in the passenger cabin, he was up in front. All them other kids," the fat boy went on. "Some of them must have got out. They must have, mustn't they?"

The fair boy began to pick his way as casually as possible toward the water, and the fat boy hurried after him.

"Aren't there any grownups at all?"

"I don't think so."

The fair boy said this solemnly; but then the delight of a realized ambition overcame him. In the middle of the scar he stood on his head and grinned at the reversed fat boy. "No grownups!"

The fat boy thought for a moment. "That pilot."

The fair boy allowed his feet to come down. "He must have flown off after he dropped us. He couldn't land here. Not in a place with wheels."

"We was attacked! When we was coming down I looked through one of them windows. I saw the other part of the plane. There were flames coming out of it." He looked up and down the scar. "And this is what the cabin done."

The fair boy reached out and touched the jagged end of a trunk. "What happened to it?" he asked. "Where's it got to now?"

"That storm dragged it out to sea. It wasn't half dangerous with all them tree trunks falling. There must have been some kids still in it." He hesitated for a moment, then spoke again. "What's your name?"

"Ralph."

The fat boy waited to be asked his name in turn but Ralph began to make his way toward the lagoon. The fat boy hung steadily at his shoulder. "I expect there's a lot more of us scattered about. You haven't seen any others, have you?"

Ralph shook his head and increased his speed.

The fat boy breathed hard. "My auntie told me not to run," he explained, "on account of my asthma."

"Ass-mar?"

"That's right. Can't catch my breath. I was the only boy in our school what had asthma," said the fat boy with a touch of pride. "And I've been wearing specs since I was three."

He took off his glasses and held them out to Ralph, blinking and smiling.

"Them fruit. Them fruit," he said, "I expect—"

He put on his glasses, waded away from Ralph, and crouched down among the tangled foliage. "I'll be out again in just a minute—"

Ralph stole away through the branches. In a few seconds the fat boy's grunts were behind him and he was hurrying toward the lagoon. He climbed over a broken trunk and was out of the jungle.

Ralph stood, one hand against a tree trunk, and screwed up his eyes against the shimmering water. The sand was thick over his black shoes and the heat hit him. He became conscious of the weight of clothes, kicked his shoes off and ripped off each stocking. Then he leapt back on the terrace, pulled off his shirt. He undid his belt, lugged off his shorts and pants, and stood there naked.

He was old enough, twelve years and a few months, to have lost the prominent tummy of childhood and not yet old enough for adolescence to have made him awkward. You could see now that he might make a boxer, as far as width and heaviness of shoulders went. He patted the palm trunk softly, and laughed delightedly again and stood on his head. He turned neatly on to his feet, jumped down to the beach. Then he sat back and looked at the water with bright, excited eyes.

"Ralph—" The fat boy lowered himself over the terrace and sat down carefully. "I'm sorry I been such a time. Them fruit—"

He wiped his glasses and adjusted them on his button nose. He looked critically at Ralph's golden body and then down at his own clothes. He laid a hand on the end of a zipper that extended down his chest.

"My auntie—" Then he opened the zipper with decision and pulled the whole windbreaker over his head. "There!"

Ralph looked at him and said nothing.

"I expect we'll want to know all their names," said the fat boy, "and make a list. We ought to have a meeting."

Ralph did not take the hint so the fat boy was forced to continue.

"I don't care what they call me," he said confidentially, "so long as they don't call me what they used to call me at school." The fat boy glanced over his shoulder, then leaned toward Ralph. He whispered. "They used to call me Piggy."

Ralph shrieked with laughter. He jumped up. "Piggy! Piggy!"

"Ralph—please!"

Piggy clasped his hands in apprehension.

"I said I didn't want—"

"Piggy! Piggy!"

Piggy grinned, pleased despite himself at the recognition.

"So long as you don't tell the others—"

Ralph giggled into the sand. The expression of pain and concentration returned to Piggy's face.

"Half a sec'."

He hastened back into the forest. Ralph stood up and trotted along to the right. A great platform of pink granite thrust up through forest. The top of this was covered with a thin layer of coarse grass and shaded with young palm trees. Ralph hauled himself onto this platform. He picked his way to the edge of the platform and stood looking down into the water. It was clear to the bottom and bright with coral. Beyond the platform there was more enchantment. Some act of God had banked sand inside the lagoon so that there was a long, deep pool in the beach. The incredible pool was so deep at one end as to be dark green. Ralph inspected the whole thirty yards carefully and then plunged in. The water was warm and he might have been swimming in a huge bath.

Piggy appeared again, sat on the rocky ledge, and watched Ralph's green and white body enviously.

"You can't half swim."

"Piggy."

Piggy took off his shoes and socks, ranged them carefully on the ledge, and tested the water with one toe.

"It's hot!"

"What did you expect?"

"I didn't expect nothing. My auntie—"

"Sucks to your auntie!"

Ralph did a surface dive and swam under water with his eyes open. He turned over, holding his nose. Piggy was looking determined and began to take off his shorts. Presently he was palely and fatly naked. He tiptoed down the sandy side of the pool, and sat there up to his neck in water smiling proudly at Ralph.

"Aren't you going to swim?"

Piggy shook his head. "I can't swim. I wasn't allowed. My asthma—"

"Sucks to your ass-mar!"

Piggy bore this with a sort of humble patience. "You can't half swim well."

Ralph paddled backwards down the slope, immersed his mouth and blew a jet of water into the air. Then he lifted his chin and spoke.

"I could swim when I was five. Daddy taught me. He's a commander in the Navy. When he gets leave he'll come and rescue us. What's your father?"

Piggy flushed suddenly.

"My dad's dead," he said quickly, "and my mum— I used to live with my auntie. She kept a candy store. I used to get ever so many candies. As many as I liked. When'll your dad rescue us?"

"Soon as he can."

Piggy rose dripping from the water and stood naked, cleaning his glasses with a sock.

"How does he know we're here?"

Ralph lolled in the water. Because, thought Ralph, because, because. "They'd tell him at

the airport.”

Piggy shook his head, put on his flashing glasses and looked down at Ralph. “Not them. Didn’t you hear what the pilot said? About the atom bomb? They’re all dead.”

Ralph pulled himself out of the water, stood facing Piggy, and considered this unusual problem.

Piggy persisted. “This an island, isn’t it?”

“I climbed a rock,” said Ralph slowly, “and I think this is an island.”

“They’re all dead,” said Piggy, “an’ this is an island. Nobody don’t know we’re here. Your dad don’t know, nobody don’t know—” His lips quivered and the spectacles were dimmed with mist. “We may stay here till we die.”

With that word the heat seemed to increase till it became a threatening weight and the lagoon attacked them with a blinding effulgence.

“Get my clothes,” muttered Ralph. “Along there.”

He trotted through the sand, crossed the platform, and found his scattered clothes. To put on a grey shirt once more was strangely pleasing. Then he climbed the edge of the platform and sat in the green shade. Piggy hauled himself up, carrying most of his clothes under his arms. Then he sat carefully on a fallen trunk. Presently he spoke.

“We got to find the others. We got to do something.”

Ralph said nothing. Here was a coral island. Protected from the sun, ignoring Piggy’s ill-omened talk, he dreamed pleasantly.

Piggy insisted. “How many of us are there?”

“I don’t know.”

“We got to do something.”

Ralph looked through him. Ralph’s lips parted in a delighted smile and Piggy, taking this smile to himself as a mark of recognition, laughed with pleasure.

“If it really is an island—”

“What’s that?”

Ralph had stopped smiling and was pointing into the lagoon. Something creamy lay among the ferny weeds.

“A stone.”

“No. A shell.” Suddenly Piggy was a-bubble with excitement.

“S’right. It’s a shell! I seen one like that before. On someone’s back wall. A conch he called it. He used to blow it and then his mum would come. It’s ever so valuable—”

Piggy leaned dangerously. “Careful! You’ll break it—”

“Shut up.” Ralph spoke absently. The shell was interesting and a worthy plaything. Ralph used one hand as a fulcrum and pressed down with the other till the shell rose, dripping, and Piggy could make a grab.

Piggy babbled: “—a conch; ever so expensive. I bet if you wanted to buy one, you’d have to pay pounds and pounds and pounds—he had it on his garden wall, and my auntie—”

Ralph took the shell from Piggy. In color the shell was deep cream, touched here and there with fading pink. Between the point and the pink lips of the mouth, lay eighteen inches of shell with a slight spiral twist. Ralph shook sand out of the deep tube.

“—mooed like a cow,” he said. “He had some white stones too, an’ a bird cage with a

green parrot. He didn't blow the white stones, of course, an' he said—"

Piggy paused for breath and stroked the glistening thing that lay in Ralph's hands.

"Ralph! We can use this to call the others. Have a meeting. They'll come when they hear us—" He beamed at Ralph. "That was what you meant, didn't you? That's why you got the conch out of the water?"

Ralph pushed back his fair hair. "How did your friend blow the conch?"

"He kind of spat," said Piggy. "My auntie wouldn't let me blow on account of my asthma. He said you blew from down here." Piggy laid a hand on his jutting abdomen. "You try, Ralph. You'll call the others."

Doubtfully, Ralph laid the small end of the shell against his mouth and blew. There came a rushing sound from its mouth but nothing more. Ralph wiped the salt water off his lips and tried again, but the shell remained silent.

"He kind of spat."

Ralph pursed his lips and squirted air into the shell, which emitted a low, farting noise. This amused both boys so much that Ralph went on squirting for some minutes, between bouts of laughter.

"He blew from down here."

Ralph grasped the idea and hit the shell with air from his diaphragm. Immediately the thing sounded. A deep note boomed, spread through the forest and echoed back from the pink mountain. Ralph took the shell away from his lips.

"Gosh!"

His ordinary voice sounded like a whisper after the harsh note of the conch. He laid the conch against his lips, took a deep breath and blew once more. The note boomed again. Piggy was shouting something, his face pleased. Ralph's breath failed. The conch was silent.

"I bet you can hear that for miles."

Ralph found his breath and blew a series of short blasts.

Piggy exclaimed: "There's one!"

A child had appeared among the palms, about a hundred yards along the beach. He was a boy of perhaps six years, his clothes torn, his face covered with a sticky mess of fruit. His trousers had been lowered for an obvious purpose and had only been pulled back half-way. He jumped off the palm terrace into the sand and his trousers fell about his ankles; he stepped out of them and trotted to the platform. Piggy helped him up. Meanwhile Ralph continued to blow till voices shouted in the forest. The small boy squatted in front of Ralph, looking up brightly.

Piggy leaned down to him. "What's yer name?"

"Johnny."

Piggy muttered the name to himself and then shouted it to Ralph, who was not interested because he was still blowing. The shouting in the forest was nearer. Signs of life were visible now on the beach. The sand, trembling beneath the heat haze, concealed many figures; boys were making their way toward the platform.

Three small children, no older than Johnny, appeared from close at hand, where they had been gorging fruit in the forest. A dark little boy, not much younger than Piggy, walked onto the platform, and smiled cheerfully at everybody. More and more of them came. Taking their cue from the innocent Johnny, they sat down on the fallen palm trunks and waited. Ralph continued

to blow short blasts.

Piggy moved among the crowd, asking names. Some were naked and carrying their clothes; others half-naked in school uniforms. There were badges, stripes of color in stockings and pullovers.

Even while he blew, Ralph noticed the last pair of bodies that reached the platform. The two boys flung themselves down and lay grinning and panting at Ralph like dogs. They were twins. They breathed together, they grinned together, they were chunky and vital. Piggy could be heard repeating their names. "Sam, Eric, Sam, Eric."

At last Ralph ceased to blow and sat there, the conch trailing from one hand. As the echoes died away so did the laughter, and there was silence.

Within the diamond haze of the beach something dark was fumbling along. Ralph watched. The creature was a party of boys, marching in two parallel lines and dressed in strange clothing. Each boy wore a square black cap with a silver badge on it. Their bodies were hidden by black cloaks which bore a long silver cross on the left breast. The boy who controlled them was dressed in the same way though his cap badge was golden. When his party was about ten yards from the platform he shouted an order and they halted. The boy himself came forward and vaulted onto the platform with his cloak flying.

"Where's the man with the trumpet?"

Ralph answered him. "There's no man with a trumpet. Only me."

The boy came close and peered down at Ralph. What he saw of the fair-haired boy with the creamy shell on his knees did not seem to satisfy him. He turned quickly, his black cloak circling.

"Isn't there a ship, then?"

Inside the floating cloak he was tall, thin, and bony; and his hair was red beneath the black cap. His face was crumpled and freckled, and ugly without silliness. Out of this face stared two light blue eyes turning to anger.

"Isn't there a man here?"

Ralph spoke to his back. "No. We're having a meeting. Come and join in."

The group of cloaked boys began to scatter from close line. The tall boy shouted at them.

"Choir! Stand still!"

Wearily obedient, the choir huddled into line and stood there swaying in the sun. None the less, some began to protest faintly.

"But, Merridew. Please, Merridew. . . can't we?"

Then one of the boys flopped on his face in the sand and the line broke up. They heaved the fallen boy to the platform and let him lie. Merridew, his eyes staring, made the best of a bad job.

"All right then. Sit down. Let him alone."

"But Merridew."

"He's always throwing a faint," said Merridew.

The choir perched like black birds on the trunks and examined Ralph. Piggy asked no names. He was intimidated by this uniformed authority in Merridew's voice. He shrank to the other side of Ralph.

Merridew turned to Ralph.

"Aren't there any grownups?"

"No."

Merridew looked round the circle. "Then we'll have to look after ourselves."

Secure on the other side of Ralph, Piggy spoke timidly. "That's why Ralph made a meeting. So as we can decide what to do. We've heard names. That's Johnny. Those two—they're twins, Sam 'n Eric. Which is Eric—? You? No—you're Sam—"

"I'm Sam—"

" 'n I'm Eric."

"We'd better all have names," said Ralph, "so I'm Ralph."

"We got most names," said Piggy. "Got 'em just now."

"Kids' names," said Merridew. "Why should I be Jack? I'm Merridew."

Ralph turned to him quickly. This was the voice of one who knew his own mind.

"Then," went on Piggy, "that boy—I forget—"

"You're talking too much," said Jack Merridew. "Shut up, Fatty."

Laughter arose.

"He's not Fatty," cried Ralph, "his real name's Piggy!"

"Piggy!"

"Piggy!"

"Oh, Piggy!"

A storm of laughter arose. Piggy went very pink. Finally the naming continued. There was Maurice, next in size among the choir boys to Jack. There was a slight boy who kept to himself with an inner intensity and secrecy. He muttered that his name was Roger. Bill, Robert, Harold, Henry; the choir boy who had fainted said that his name was Simon.

Jack spoke. "We've got to decide about being rescued."

There was a buzz. One of the small boys, Henry, said that he wanted to go home.

"Shut up," said Ralph lifted the conch. "Seems to me we ought to have a chief to decide things."

"A chief! A chief!"

"I ought to be chief," said Jack with arrogance, "because I'm chapter chorister and head boy. I can sing C sharp."

Another buzz.

"Well then," said Jack, "I—" He hesitated. The dark boy, Roger, stirred at last and spoke.

"Let's have a vote."

"Yes!"

"Vote for chief!"

"Let's vote—"

This toy of voting was almost as pleasing as the conch. The clamor changed to the general wish for a chief to an election of Ralph. None of the boys could have found good reason for this; what intelligence had been shown was traceable to Piggy while the most obvious leader was Jack. But there was a stillness about Ralph that marked him out: there was his size, and attractive appearance; and, most powerfully, there was the conch. The being that had blown that, had sat waiting for them on the platform with the delicate thing balanced on his knees, was

set apart.

"Him with the shell."

"Ralph! Ralph!"

"Let him be chief with the trumpet-thing."

Ralph raised a hand for silence.

"All right. Who wants Jack for chief?"

With dreary obedience the choir raised their hands.

"Who wants me?"

Every hand outside the choir except Piggy's was raised immediately. Then Piggy, too, raised his hand grudgingly into the air.

Ralph counted. "I'm chief then."

The circle of boys broke into applause. Even the choir applauded; and the freckles on Jack's face disappeared under a blush of mortification. Ralph looked at him, eager to offer something.

"The choir belongs to you, of course."

"They could be the army—"

"Or hunters—"

"They could be—"

The suffusion drained away from Jack's face. Ralph waved again for silence. "Jack's in charge of the choir. They can be—what do you want them to be?"

"Hunters."

Jack and Ralph smiled at each other with shy liking. The rest began to talk eagerly.

Jack stood up. "All right, choir. Take off your togs."

As if released from class, the choir boys piled their black cloaks on the grass. Ralph smiled and held up the conch for silence. "Listen, everybody. I've got to have time to think things out. I can't decide what to do straight off. If this isn't an island we might be rescued straight away. So we've got to decide if this is an island. Everybody must stay round here and not go away. Three of us will go on an expedition and find out. I'll go, and Jack, and, and. . . ." He looked round the circle of eager faces. There was no lack of boys to choose from. "And Simon."

The boys around Simon giggled, and he stood up. Now that the pallor of his faint was over, he was a skinny, vivid little boy, with a glance coming up from under a hut of straight hair that hung down, black. He nodded at Ralph. "I'll come."

"And I—"

Jack snatched from behind him a sizable sheath-knife and clouted it into a trunk. The buzz rose and died away.

Piggy stirred. "I'll come."

Ralph turned to him. "You're no good on a job like this."

"All the same—"

"We don't want you," said Jack, flatly. "Three's enough."

Piggy's glasses flashed. "I was with him when he found the conch. I was with him before anyone else was."

Jack and the others paid no attention. Ralph, Jack and Simon jumped off the platform

and walked past the bathing pool. Piggy hung behind them.

"If Simon walks in the middle of us," said Ralph, "then we could talk over his head."

The three of them fell into step. This meant that every now and then Simon had to do a double shuffle to catch up with the others. Presently Ralph stopped and turned back to Piggy.

"Look."

Jack and Simon pretended to notice nothing. They walked on.

"You can't come."

Piggy's glasses were misted again—this time with humiliation.

"You told 'em. After what I said." His face flushed, his mouth trembled. "After I said I didn't want—"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"About being called Piggy. I said I didn't care as long as they didn't call me Piggy; an' I said not to tell and then you went an' said straight out—"

Ralph, looking with more understanding at Piggy, saw that he was hurt and crushed. He hovered between the two: courses of apology or further insult.

"Better Piggy than Fatty," he said at last, with the directness of genuine leadership, "and anyway, I'm sorry if you feel like that. Now go back, Piggy, and take names. That's your job. So long."

He turned and raced after the other two. Piggy went back to the platform.

The three boys walked briskly. They turned to each other, laughing excitedly.

"Come on," said Jack presently, "we're explorers."

"We'll go to the end of the island," said Ralph, "and look round the corner."

"If it is an island—"

They found the end of the island, quite distinct.

"We shan't see round this corner," said Jack, "because there isn't one. Only a slow curve—and you can see, the rocks get worse—"

Ralph shaded his eyes and followed the jagged outline of the crags up toward the mountain. This part of the beach was nearer the mountain than any other.

"We'll try climbing the mountain from here," he said. "I should think this is the easiest way. There's less of that jungly stuff; and more pink rock. Come on."

The three boys began to scramble up. Some unknown force had shattered these cubes so that they lay piled on each other. The pink cliffs rose out of the ground; there were often narrow tracks winding upwards. They could edge along them, their faces to the rock.

"What made this track?" Jack paused, wiping the sweat from his face. Ralph stood by him, breathless.

"Men?"

Jack shook his head. "Animals."

Ralph peered into the darkness under the trees. "Come on."

The difficulty was the steep ascent around the rock. Somehow, they moved up. Ralph turned with shining eyes to the others.

"Wacco."

"Wizard."

The cause of their pleasure was not obvious. All three were hot, dirty and exhausted.

"This is real exploring," said Jack. "I bet nobody's been here before."

"We ought to draw a map," said Ralph, "only we haven't any paper."

"We could make scratches on bark," said Simon, "and rub black stuff in."

Ralph spoke, "Look! Look!"

High over this end of the island, the shattered rocks lifted up their stacks and chimneys. This one, against which Jack leaned, moved with a grating sound when they pushed.

"Come on—"

The rock was as large as a small motor car.

"Heave!"

Sway back and forth, catch the rhythm.

"Heave!"

Increase the swing of the pendulum, increase, increase, come up and bear against that point of furthest balance.

"Heave!"

The great rock loitered, poised on one toe, leapt through the air and smashed a deep hole in the forest. The forest shook as with the passage of an enraged monster: and then the island was still.

"Like a bomb!"

"Whee-aa-oo!"

The way to the top was easy after that. As they reached the last stretch Ralph stopped.

"Golly!" They were on the lip of a circular hollow in the side of the mountain. They had correctly guessed this was an island. Ralph turned to the others.

"This belongs to us."

The island was roughly boat-shaped: humped near this end. On either side rocks, cliffs, treetops and then the jungly flat of the island. There was another island; a rock, almost detached, standing like a fort. The boys surveyed all this.

"That's a reef. A coral reef. I've seen pictures like that."

Jack pointed down. "That's where we landed."

Beyond falls and cliffs there was a gash visible in the trees.

"There's no village smoke, and no boats," said Ralph wisely. "We'll make sure later; but I think it's uninhabited."

"We'll get food," cried Jack. "Hunt. Catch things until they fetch us."

Simon looked at them both, saying nothing but nodding till his black hair flopped backwards and forwards.

Ralph spread his arms. "All ours."

They laughed and tumbled and shouted on the mountain.

"I'm hungry."

When Simon mentioned his hunger the others became aware of theirs.

"Come on," said Ralph. "We've found out what we wanted to know."

They scrambled down a rock slope, dropped among flowers and made their way under the trees. They were plonking with weary feet on a track, when they heard squeaking and the hard strike of hoofs on a path. As they pushed forward the squeaking increased till it became a

frenzy. They found a piglet caught in a curtain of creepers. Its voice was thin and insistent; The three boys rushed forward and Jack drew his knife with a flourish. He raised his arm in the air. There came a pause -- the pig continued to scream and the blade continued to flash at the end of a bony arm. The pause was only long enough for them to understand what an enormity the downward stroke would be. Then the piglet tore loose from and scurried into the undergrowth. They were left looking at each other and the place of terror. Jack's face was white under the freckles. He noticed that he still held the knife aloft and brought his arm down replacing the blade in the sheath.

"I was choosing a place," said Jack. "I was just waiting for a moment to decide where to stab him."

"You should stick a pig," said Ralph fiercely. "They always talk about sticking a pig."

"You cut a pig's throat to let the blood out," said Jack, "otherwise you can't eat the meat."

"Why didn't you—?"

They knew very well why he hadn't: because of the enormity of the knife descending and cutting into living flesh; because of the unbearable blood.

"I was going to," said Jack. "I was choosing a place. Next time—!"

He snatched his knife out of the sheath and slammed it into a tree trunk. Next time there would be no mercy. He looked round fiercely, daring them to contradict. Then they moved down the scar toward the platform and the meeting.