

Chapter 10

The Shell and the Glasses

Piggy eyed the advancing figure carefully. Nowadays he sometimes found that he saw more clearly if he removed his glasses and shifted the one lens to the other eye; but even through the good eye, Ralph remained unmistakably Ralph. He came now out of the coconut trees, limping, dirty, with dead leaves hanging from his yellow hair. One eye was a slit in his puffy cheek and a great scab had formed on his right knee.

"Piggy? Are you the only one left?"

"There's some littluns."

"They don't count. No biguns?"

"Oh—Samneric. They're collecting wood."

"Nobody else?"

"Not that I know of."

Ralph climbed on to the platform carefully, and for a long minute there was silence. At last Ralph cleared his throat and whispered something.

"Simon."

Piggy said nothing but nodded. They continued to sit, gazing with impaired sight at the chief's seat. At length Ralph got up and went to the conch. He took the shell caressingly with both hands.

"Piggy. What we going to do?"

Piggy nodded at the conch. "You could—"

"Call an assembly?" Ralph laughed sharply.

"You're still chief."

Ralph laughed again.

"Ralph! Stop laughing like that. Look, there ain't no need, Ralph! What's the others going to think?"

At last Ralph stopped. He was shivering. "Piggy. That was Simon."

"You said that before."

"Piggy. That was murder."

"You stop it!" said Piggy, shrilly. "What good're you doing talking like that? It was dark. There was that—that bloody dance. There was lightning and thunder and rain. We was scared!"

"I wasn't scared," said Ralph slowly, "I was—I don't know what I was."

"We was scared!" said Piggy excitedly. "Anything might have happened. It wasn't—what you said."

"Oh, Piggy! Don't you understand, Piggy? The things we did—"

"He may still be— P'raps he was only pretending—" Piggy's voice trailed off.

"You were outside. Outside the circle. You never really came in. Didn't you see

what we—what they did?” There was loathing in his voice. “Didn’t you see, Piggy?”

“Not all that well. I only got one eye now. You ought to know that, Ralph.”

Ralph continued to rock to and fro.

“It was an accident,” said Piggy suddenly, “that’s what it was. An accident.

Coming in the dark—he hadn’t no business crawling like that out of the dark. He was batty. He asked for it. It was an accident.”

“You didn’t see what they did—”

“Look, Ralph. We got to forget this. We can’t do no good thinking about it, see?”

“I’m frightened. Of us. I want to go home. Oh God, I want to go home.”

“It was an accident,” said Piggy stubbornly, “and that’s that.” He touched Ralph’s bare shoulder and Ralph shuddered at the human contact. “And look, Ralph”—Piggy glanced round quickly, then leaned close— “don’t let on we was in that dance. Not to Samneric.”

“But we were! All of us!”

Piggy shook his head. “Not us till last. They never noticed in the dark. Anyway you said I was only on the outside.”

“So was I,” muttered Ralph, “I was on the outside too.”

Piggy nodded eagerly. “That’s right. We was on the outside. We never done nothing, we never seen nothing. We’ll live on our own, the four of us—”

“Four of us. We aren’t enough to keep the fire burning.”

“We’ll try. See? I lit it.”

Samneric came dragging a great log out of the forest. They dumped it by the fire and turned to the pool. Ralph jumped to his feet. “Hi! You two!”

The twins were very surprised to see Ralph. “Hullo. Fancy meeting you, Ralph. We just been in the forest— to get wood for the fire —we got lost last night.”

Ralph examined his toes. “You got lost after the. . .”

“After the feast,” said Sam in a stifled voice. Eric nodded. “Yes, after the feast.”

“We left early,” said Piggy quickly, “because we were tired.”

“So did we—”

“—very early—”

“—we were very tired.”

Sam touched a scratch on his forehead and then hurriedly took his hand away. Eric fingered his split lip. “Yes. We were very tired,” repeated Sam, “so we left early. Was it a good—dance?”

Memory of the dance that none of them had attended shook all four boys convulsively. “We left early.”

When Roger came to the neck of land that joined the Castle Rock to the mainland he was not surprised to be challenged. The voice rang out sharply from on high, “Halt! Who goes there?”

"Roger."

"Advance, friend."

Roger advanced. "You could see who I was."

"The chief said we got to challenge everyone."

"You couldn't stop me coming if I wanted."

"Couldn't I? Climb up and see."

Roger clambered up the ladder-like cliff.

"Look at this."

A log had been jammed under the topmost rock and another lever under that. Robert leaned lightly on the lever and the rock groaned. A full effort would send the rock thundering down to the neck of land. Roger admired.

"He's a proper chief, isn't he?"

Robert nodded. "He's going to take us hunting."

He jerked his head in the direction of the distant shelters where a thread of white smoke climbed up the sky.

"He's going to beat Wilfred."

"What for?"

Robert shook his head doubtfully. "I don't know. He didn't say. He got angry and made us tie Wilfred up. He's been"—he giggled excitedly—"he's been tied for hours."

"But didn't the chief say why?"

"I never heard him."

Sitting on the tremendous rock, Roger received this news as an illumination. Then, he climbed down the rocks toward the cave. The chief was sitting there, naked to the waist, his face blocked out in white and red. The tribe lay in a semicircle before him. The newly beaten and untied Wilfred was sniffing noisily. Roger squatted with the rest.

"Tomorrow," went on the chief, "we shall hunt again. Some of you will stay here to improve the cave and defend the gate. I shall take a few hunters with me and bring back meat. The defenders of the gate will see that the others don't sneak in."

A savage raised his hand and the chief turned a bleak, painted face toward him.

"Why should they try to sneak in, Chief?"

"They will. They'll try to spoil things we do. So the watchers at the gate must be careful. And then—the beast might try to come in. You remember how he crawled—"

The semicircle shuddered and muttered in agreement.

"He came—disguised. He may come again even though we gave him the head of our kill to eat. So watch; and be careful."

Stanley lifted his forearm off the rock and held up an interrogative finger. "But didn't we, didn't we—?"

He squirmed and looked down.

"No!" In the silence that followed, each savage flinched away from his individual

memory.

“No! How could we—kill—it?”

Half-relieved, the savages murmured again. “So leave the mountain alone,” said the chief, solemnly, “and give it the head if you go hunting.”

Stanley flicked his finger again.

“I expect the beast disguised itself.”

“Perhaps,” said the chief. “We’d better keep on the right side of him, anyhow. You can’t tell what he might do. But tomorrow we’ll hunt and when we’ve got meat we’ll have a feast—”

Bill put up his hand. “Chief? What’ll we use for lighting the fire?”

The chief’s blush was hidden by the white and red clay. Into his uncertain silence the tribe spilled their murmur once more. Then the chief held up his hand.

“We shall take fire from the others. Listen. Tomorrow we’ll hunt and get meat. Tonight I’ll go along with two hunters—who’ll come?”

Maurice and Roger put up their hands. The chief nodded.

“The rest of you can go to sleep as soon as the sun sets. But us three, Maurice, Roger and me, we’ve got work to do. We’ll leave just before sunset—”

Piggy handed Ralph his glasses and waited to receive back his sight. The wood was damp; and this was the third time they had lighted it.

Ralph stood back, speaking to himself. “We don’t want another night without fire.”

He looked round guiltily at the three boys standing by. This was the first time he had admitted the double function of the fire. Certainly one was to send up a beckoning column of smoke; but the other was to be a comfort until they slept. Piggy took back his glasses and looked at the smoke with pleasure.

“If only we could make a radio!”

Ralph dredged in his fading knowledge of the world. “We might get taken prisoner by the Reds.”

Eric pushed back his hair. “They’d be better than—”

He would not name people and Sam finished the sentence for him by nodding along the beach. Ralph remembered the ungainly figure on a parachute.

“He said something about a dead man.” He flushed painfully at this admission that he had been present at the dance.

“Let’s get something to eat.”

Together they went to the fruit trees, carrying their spears. When they came out of the forest again the sun was setting and only embers glowed in the fire, and there was no smoke.

“I can’t carry any more wood,” said Eric. “I’m tired.” Ralph cleared his throat.

“We kept the fire going up there.”

“Up there it was small. But this has got to be a big one. We’ve got to keep it going.”

Eric flung himself down. “I’m too tired. And what’s the good?”

“Eric!” cried Ralph in a shocked voice. “Don’t talk like that!”

Sam knelt by Eric. “Well—what is the good?”

Ralph tried indignantly to remember. There was something good about a fire. Something overwhelmingly good.

“Ralph’s told you often enough,” said Piggy moodily. “How else are we going to be rescued?”

“Of course! If we don’t make smoke— Don’t you understand? What’s the good of wishing for radios and boats? There’s only one thing we can do to get out of this mess. Anyone can play at hunting, anyone can get us meat—”

He looked from face to face. Then, at the moment of greatest passion and conviction, he forgot what he had been driving at.

The fire was dying on them.

“We can’t get any more wood, Ralph—”

“—not in the dark—”

“We can light it every morning,” said Piggy. “Nobody ain’t going to see smoke in the dark.”

Ralph stood up, feeling curiously defenseless with the darkness pressing in. “Let the fire go then, for tonight.” He led the way to the first shelter, which still stood, though battered. The twins lay together and Ralph and Piggy at the other end. For a while there was the continual creak and rustle of leaves as they tried for comfort.

“Piggy.”

“Yeah?”

“All right?”

“S’pose so.”

At length the shelter was silent. Ralph settled himself for his nightly game of supposing. . . . Supposing they could be transported home by jet, then before morning they would land at that big airfield in Wiltshire. They would go by car; no, for things to be perfect they would go by train. . . .

“Ralph! Ralph!”

“What is it?”

From the darkness of the further end of the shelter came a dreadful moaning and they shattered the leaves in their fear. Sam and Eric, locked in an embrace, were fighting each other.

“Sam! Sam!”

“Hey—Eric!”

Presently all was quiet again.

Piggy spoke softly to Ralph.

"We got to get out of this."

"What d'you mean?"

"Get rescued. I mean it, if we don't get home soon we'll be barmy."

"Crackers." Ralph pushed the damp tendrils of hair out of his eyes.

"You write a letter to your auntie."

Piggy considered this solemnly. "I don't know where she is now. And I haven't got an envelope and a stamp. An' there isn't a mailbox. Or a postman."

The success of his tiny joke overcame Ralph. His sniggers became uncontrollable, his body jumped and twitched. Piggy rebuked him with dignity.

"Be quiet—and listen."

Ralph lay down carefully. Eric moaned something and then lay still. The darkness was blanket-thick.

"I can't hear anything."

"There's something moving outside."

Ralph's head prickled. The sound of his blood drowned all else and then subsided.

"I still can't hear anything."

"Listen. Listen for a long time."

Quite clearly and emphatically, and only a yard or so away from the shelter, a stick cracked. The blood roared again in Ralph's ears. He could feel Piggy's head against his shoulder and the convulsive grip of a hand.

"Ralph! Ralph!"

"Shut up and listen."

Desperately, Ralph prayed that the beast would prefer littluns.

A voice whispered horribly outside. "Piggy—Piggy—"

"It's come!" gasped Piggy. "It's real!"

He clung to Ralph and reached to get his breath.

"Piggy, come outside. I want you, Piggy."

Ralph's mouth was against Piggy's ear. "Don't say anything."

Something brushed against the back of the shelter. Piggy kept still for a moment, then he had his asthma. He arched his back and crashed among the leaves with his legs. Ralph rolled away from him. Then there was a vicious snarling in the mouth of the shelter and the plunge and thump of living things. Someone tripped over Ralph and Piggy's corner became a complication of snarls and crashes and flying limbs. Ralph hit out; then he and what seemed like a dozen others were rolling over, hitting, biting, scratching. He was torn and jolted, found fingers in his mouth and bit them. A fist withdrew and came back like a piston. Ralph twisted sideways on top of a writhing body and felt hot breath on his cheek. He began to pound the mouth below him, using his

clenched fist as a hammer; he hit with more and more passionate hysteria as the face became slippery. A knee jerked up between his legs and he fell sideways, busying himself with his pain, and the fight rolled over him. Then the shelter collapsed with smothering finality; and the anonymous shapes fought their way out. Dark figures drew themselves out of the wreckage and flitted away, till the screams of the littluns and Piggy's gasps were once more audible. Ralph called out in a quavering voice.

"All you littluns, go to sleep. We've had a fight with the others. Now go to sleep."

Samneric came close and peered at Ralph.

"Are you two all right?"

"I think so—"

"—I got busted."

"So did I. How's Piggy?"

They hauled Piggy clear of the wreckage and leaned him against a tree. "Did you get hurt, Piggy?"

"Not much."

"That was Jack and his hunters," said Ralph bitterly. "Why can't they leave us alone?"

"We gave them something to think about," said Sam. "At least you did. I got mixed up with myself in a corner."

"I gave one of 'em what for," said Ralph, "I smashed him up all right. He won't want to come and fight us again in a hurry."

"So did I," said Eric. "When I woke up one was kicking me in the face. I got an awful bloody face, I think, Ralph. But I did him in the end."

"What did you do?"

"I got my knee up," said Eric with simple pride, "and I hit him with it in the pills. You should have heard him holler! He won't come back in a hurry either. So we didn't do too badly."

Ralph moved suddenly in the dark; but then he heard Eric working his mouth.

"What's the matter?"

"Jus' a tooth loose."

"You all right, Piggy?"

"I thought they wanted the conch but they didn't come for the conch. They came for something else. Ralph—what am I going to do?"

Far off along the beach, three figures trotted toward the Castle Rock. The chief led then, exulting in his achievement. He was a chief now in truth. From his left hand dangled Piggy's broken glasses.