Chapter Three

Huts on the Beach

Jack was bent double. He was down like a sprinter, his nose only a few inches from the humid earth. The tree trunks and the creepers that festooned them lost themselves in a green dusk thirty feet above him, and all about was the undergrowth. There was only the faintest indication of a trail here; a cracked twig and what might be the impression of one side of a hoof. He lowered his chin and stared at the traces as though he would force them to speak to him. Then dog-like, uncomfortably on all fours yet unheedingly his discomfort, he stole forward five yards and stopped. Here was loop of creeper with a tendril pendant from a node. The tendril was polished on the underside; pigs, passing through the loop, brushed it with their bristly hide.

Jack crouched with his face a few inches away from this clue, then stared forward into the semi-darkness of the undergrowth. His sandy hair, considerably longer than it had been when they dropped in, was lighter now; and his bare back was a mass of dark freckles and peeling sunburn. A sharpened stick about five feet long trailed from his right hand, and except for a pair of tattered shorts held up by his knife-belt he was naked. He closed his eyes, raised his head and breathed in gently with flared nostrils, assessing the current of warm air for information. The forest and he were very still.

At length he let out his breath in a long sigh and opened his eyes. They were bright blue, eyes that in this frustration seemed bolting and nearly mad. He passed his tongue across dry lips and scanned the uncommunicative forest. Then again he stole forward and cast this way and that over the ground.

The silence of the forest was more oppressive than the heat, and at this hour of the day there was not even the whine of insects. Only when Jack himself roused a gaudy bird from a primitive nest of sticks was the silence shattered and echoes set ringing by a harsh cry that seemed to come out of the abyss of ages. Jack himself shrank at this cry with a hiss of indrawn breath, and for a minute became less a hunter than a furtive thing, ape-like among the tangle of trees. Then the trail, the frustration, claimed him again and he searched the ground avidly. By the trunk of a vast tree that grew pale flowers on its grey bark he checked, closed his eyes, and once more drew in the warm air; and this time his breath came short, there was even a passing pallor in his face, and then the surge of blood again. He passed like a shadow under the darkness of the tree and crouched, looking down at the trodden ground at his feet.

The droppings were warm. They lay piled among turned earth. They were olive green, smooth, and they steamed a little. Jack lifted his head and stared at the inscrutable masses of creeper that lay across the trail. Then he raised his spear and sneaked forward. Beyond the creeper, the trail joined a pig-run that was wide enough and trodden enough to be a path. The ground was hardened by an accustomed tread and as Jack rose to his full height he heard something moving on it. He swung back his right arm and hurled the spear with all his strength. From the pig-run came the quick, hard patter of hoofs, a castanet sound, seductive, maddening—the promise of meat. He rushed out of the undergrowth and snatched up his spear.

The pattering of pig's trotters died away in the distance.

Jack stood there, streaming with sweat, streaked with brown earth, stained by all the vicissitudes of a day's hunting. Swearing, he turned off the trail and pushed his way through until the forest opened a little and instead of bald trunks supporting a dark roof there were light grey trunks and crowns of feathery palm. Beyond these was the glitter of the sea and he could hear voices. Ralph was standing by a contraption of palm trunks and leaves, a rude shelter.
forehead. He wore the remains of shorts and his feet were bare like Jack's. Always darkish in color, Simon was burned by the sun to a deep tan that glistened with sweat.

He picked his way up the scar, passed the great rock where Ralph had climbed on the first morning, then turned off to his right among the trees. He walked with an accustomed tread through the acres of fruit trees, where the least energetic could find an easy if unsatisfying meal. Flower and fruit grew together on the same tree and everywhere was the scent of ripeness and the booming of a million bees at pasture. Here the littluns who had run after him caught up with him. They talked, cried out unintelligibly, hugged him toward the trees. Then, amid the roar of bees in the afternoon sunlight, Simon found for them the fruit they could not reach, pulled off the choicest from up in the foliage, passed them back down to the endless, outstretched hands. When he had satisfied them he paused and looked round. The littluns watched him inscrutably over double handfuls of ripe fruit.

Simon turned away from them and went where the just perceptible path led him. Soon high jungle closed in. Tall trunks bore unexpected pale flowers all the way up to the dark canopy where life went on clamorously. The air here was dark too, and the creepers dropped their ropes like the rigging of foundered ships. His feet left prints in the soft soil and the creepers shivered throughout their lengths when he bumped them.

He came last to a place where more sunshine fell. Since they had not so far to go for light the creepers had woven a great mat that hung at the side of an open space in the jungle; for here a patch of rock came close to the surface and would not allow more than little plants and ferns to grow. The whole space was walled with dark aromatic bushes, and was a bowl of heat and light. A great tree, fallen across one corner, leaned against the trees that still stood and a rapid climber flaunted red and yellow sprays right to the top.

Simon paused. He looked over his shoulder as Jack had done at the close ways behind him and glanced swiftly round to confirm that he was utterly alone. For a moment his movements were almost furtive. Then he bent down and wormed his way into the center of the mat. The creepers and the bushes were so close that he left his sweat on them and they pulled together behind him. When he was secure in the middle he was in a little cabin screened off from the open space by a few leaves. He squatted down, parted the leaves and looked out into the clearing. Nothing moved but a pair of gaudy butterflies that danced round each other in the hot air. Holding his breath he cocked a critical ear at the sounds of the island. Evening was advancing toward the island; the sounds of the bright fantastic birds, the bee-sounds, even the crying of the gulls that were returning to their roosts among the square rocks, were fainter. The deep sea breaking miles away on the reef made an undertone less perceptible than the susurrations of the blood.

Simon dropped the screen of leaves back into place. The slope of the bars of honey-colored sunlight decreased; they slid up the bushes, passed over the green candle-like buds, moved up toward the canopy, and darkness thickened under the trees. With the fading of the light the riotous colors died and the heat and urgency cooled away. The candle-buds stirred. Their green sepals drew back a little and the white tips of the flowers rose delicately to meet the open air.

Now the sunlight had lifted clear of the open space and withdrawn from the sky. Darkness poured out, submerging the ways between the trees till they were dim and strange as the bottom of the sea. The candle-buds opened their wide white flowers glimmering under the light that pricked down from the first stars. Their scent spilt out into the air and took possession of the island.

1. What is the mood of this passage? Circle the words that indicate the mood, and explain the connotations that these words have.

2. Give examples of figurative language in this passage. How does this language contribute to the overall meaning of the passage?

3. Give specific examples of images in this passage that suggest that Simon is a "Christ-like" figure.

4. Compare and contrast the imagery and mood in passage 1 and passage 2.

5. Based on evidence found in both passages, compare and contrast Jack and Simon while they are in nature. *MLA citations necessary!*