

The Hunters

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Minutes before mid-morning, the blazing sunlight was already scorching the palm tree leaves and heating the stream that flowed from the waterfall. The hunters were advancing sturdily through the vegetation, in spite of the heaviness of the muggy atmosphere. Their stomachs were rumbling due to the absence of edible matter.

The strategy was clear and no one had attempted to complain about it since they set off because there was a recognizable leader. Jack, the first member –and founder– of the tribe, was marching ahead, following the traces in the muddy ground that proved they were on the right path. Nobody had invested him with the leadership, but his experience –and his height, which was considerably greater– sort of gave him the advantage over the rest.

The rest of the tribe, conformed by the younger members, was trudging through the flora of the island, trying not to trip over the abundant greenery of the route they were taking. In the serenity of the silent morning, the rhythm of their breathing evolved into panting.

The second member of the tribe, a skinny, pale Simon, was clutching his crook –a fallen branch– so as to track Jack's advance along the steep land.

The third member, a strongly built, sweaty Douglas, the colour of whose cheeks had shifted from soft peach to bright red after the first three thousand steps, was wincing at the blinding sunlight cutting through the palm trees.

The fourth member, the shortest one, Tim, was the skilled collector of all kinds of edible fruit and flowers; his latest discovery were three types of berries, picked from a thick mulberry bush, but when he attempted to pull them out, stepping on a stone as the rung of a ladder, his short legs wobbled and he finally obtained smashed raspberries.

When the leader looked back to supervise his fierce hunters, their pace had already slackened and were now stumping. To save the last breath of hope they had on their pursuit, he reported promptly:

"Look at the trails, we're getting near the prize. We can't afford to be tired now, chaps!"

"How can you be so fresh in this boiling weather?" protested Tim. "We've been going round in circles for hours already, and the only sign of food is a clump of trampled raspberries."

"Trust me, I've led this exploration many times and it's always worked." assured Jack.

"How many times?"

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"Two. But we found the greatest feast on the island: a huge boar. And this time I have a hunch that the prize is going to be greater."

"Greater than a boar?" asked Douglas, almost drooling.

"And tastier," encouraged Jack.

"The only thing I can taste now is my salty sweat." uttered Simon.

"Yeah, I think we should rest here for a while," added Douglas.

"Why don't we just eat these muddy raspberries?" suggested Tim.

"Hold on, chaps. Can't you smell that?" Jack interrupted.

"It's not me! I had a bath this morning!" Douglas complained.

"No, it's like a smoky waft."

In the distance, an almost imperceptible sign of smoke became more and more visible as the acrid smell became stronger.

"Wait, I can feel it too." said Tim.

"Come on, boys."

With the last remnants of strength in their starving bodies, they went on, following the sounds of living nature and the trail of smoke that built into a cloud. They followed the burning fumes through the leaves, through the bushes, through the reflection of the flaming sunshine, they went up and ahead.

When they had almost reached the origin of the savoury waft, they heard voices in the distance. It seemed like the presence of foreign tribes. Expecting to be the only ones hunting on the island, they were caught off guard. But greater was the roaring of their stomachs waiting to be satisfied. They stared at each other and agreed that on the other side their prize must be awaiting them.

Finally, they came closer and closer to the provenance of the aroma, they trampled past bushes and trees and found a huge bonfire inside a grill with a swine being cooked on it. That was the source of the heavenly waft that emanated, filling the air of the woods. And it was all theirs.

Jack ordered the tribe to come to a halt and took the lead. He would make the defining move. But just when he was about to pounce on the feast, a tall, displeased woman came out of the blue carrying a kind of sword with two sharp points at one end. She noticed the hunters' presence and was determined to defend the grilled meat. Before they could flee, they were halted by an imposing voice:

"For God's sake, Jack Hunter. Where were you? I put you in charge of your brothers and you disappear for three hours! From now on, holiday explorations are forbidden, and you will not have pork for lunch!"