

It Was Dreadful in the Forest

by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle *from The Lost World*

The narrator in this passage is Edward Malone. He is a reporter who is traveling with scientists in South America. They have discovered an area filled with strange creatures including dinosaurs. In this passage, Malone is in a forest where he finds himself being hunted.

All was quiet as in a dream landscape. Silver clearings and the black patches of the bushes—nothing else could I see. Then from out of the silence, imminent and threatening, there came once more that low, throaty croaking, far louder and closer than before. There could no longer be a doubt. Something was on my trail, and was closing in upon me every minute.

I stood like a man paralyzed, still staring at the ground which I had traversed. Then suddenly I saw it. There was movement among bushes at the far end of the clearing which I had just traversed. A great dark shadow disengaged itself and hopped out into the clear moonlight. I say “hopped” advisedly, for the beast moved like a kangaroo, springing along in an erect position upon its powerful hind legs, while its front ones were held bent in front of it. It was of enormous size and power, like an erect elephant, but its movements, in spite of its bulk, were exceedingly alert. For a moment, as I saw its shape, I hoped that it was an iguanodon, which I knew to be harmless, but, ignorant as I was, I soon saw that this was a very different creature. Instead of the gentle, deer-shaped head of the great three-toed leaf-eater, this beast had a broad, squat, toad-like face like that which had alarmed us in our camp. His ferocious cry and the horrible energy of his pursuit both assured me that this was surely one of the great flesh-eating dinosaurs, the most terrible beasts which have ever walked this earth. As the huge brute loped along it dropped forward upon its fore-paws and brought its nose to the ground every twenty yards or so. It was smelling out my trail. Sometimes, for an instant, it was at fault. Then it would catch it up again and come bounding swiftly along the path I had taken.

Even now when I think of that nightmare the sweat breaks out upon my brow. What could I do? My useless fowling-piece was in my hand. What help could I get from that? I looked desperately round for some rock or tree, but I was in a bushy jungle with nothing higher than a sapling within sight, while I knew that the creature behind me could tear down an ordinary tree as though it were a reed. My only possible chance lay in flight. I could not move swiftly over the rough, broken ground, but as I looked round me in despair I saw a well-marked, hard-beaten path which ran across in front of me. We had seen several of the sort, the runs of various wild beasts, during our expeditions. Along this I could perhaps hold my own, for I was a fast runner, and in excellent condition. Flinging away my useless gun, I set myself to do such a half-mile as I have never done before or since. My limbs ached, my chest heaved, I felt that my throat would burst for want of air, and yet with that horror behind me I ran and I ran and ran. At last I paused, hardly able to move. For a moment I thought that I had thrown him off. The path lay still behind me. And then suddenly, with a crashing and a rending, a thudding of giant feet and a panting of monster lungs the beast was upon me once more.

He was at my very heels. I was lost.

Questions

Below are words and phrases from the passage. Use the context to discover the meaning of the underlined phrase. Circle the letter of the correct meaning.

1. "...at the far end of the clearing which I had just traversed..."
 - A. I had just avoided
 - B. I had just crossed
 - C. I had just looked at
 - D. I had just explored

2. "It was smelling out my trail. Sometimes, for an instant, it was at fault."
 - A. it looked away
 - B. it was lucky
 - C. it was correct
 - D. it was mistaken

3. "As the huge brute loped along..."
 - A. big monster ran
 - B. big lizard walked
 - C. scary lizard crept
 - D. large beast circled

4. "And then suddenly, with a crashing and a rending..."
 - A. a thundering
 - B. a booming
 - C. a tearing
 - D. a rush

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. imminent
2. traversed
3. exceedingly
4. ferocious
5. brute
6. fowling-piece
7. sapling
8. rending

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) “Then from out of the silence, **imminent** and threatening”

a. important b. loud or deafening c. frightening d. about to happen; immediate

2) “staring at the ground which I had **traversed**”

a. crossed or passed over b. found; discovered c. not seen; ignored d. future path

3) “its movements, in spite of its bulk, were **exceedingly** alert”

a. cautiously; nervously b. highly; extremely c. slightly or barely d. successfully

4) “His **ferocious** cry”

a. soft or muffled b. squeaky; high-pitched c. distant or far away d. savage or fierce

5) “As the huge **brute** loped along”

a. rolling log b. pursuer or chaser c. beast or animal d. land vehicle

6) “My useless **fowling-piece** was in my hand”

a. walking stick b. gun or rifle c. bat or club d. sword or cutlass

7) “a bushy jungle with nothing higher than a **sapling**”

- a. low rock b. grass hut or shack c. small tree; seedling d. small hill

8) “suddenly, with a crashing and a **rending**”

- a. ripping; tearing b. shrieking or crying c. huffing; panting d. flashing or blazing