

CHAPTER 4

DANGER IN THE FOREST

The next day we rested while we recovered from our injuries. That night we were woken from our sleep by terrible cries and screams. A cold sweat broke out over my body and my heart turned sick at the sound of a creature in agony. The cries were soon joined by a deep growl and then there was silence.

‘What was it?’ I whispered.

‘We shall know in the morning,’ said Lord John.

We tried to settle down again but there came the sound of padding footsteps and heavy breathing as something circled our camp. I peered through a gap in the thorn bushes and saw a hissing, panting creature about the size of a horse.

‘I believe it’s going to spring!’ I cried and reached for my rifle.

‘Don’t fire!’ said Lord John, softly. ‘The noise will be heard for miles on a night like this.’

He then did the bravest thing I have ever seen. He picked up a blazing branch from the fire, slipped through the gap and lunged at the beast, thrusting the branch at it. I saw a horrible face, like a giant toad’s, and a vicious mouth, and then with a dreadful snarl the creature was gone. Lord John returned and said that from now on we must take turns keeping watch through the night.

The next day we went exploring again. At the spot where we had seen the family of iguanodons there were now pools of blood and lumps of torn flesh.

‘What we heard last night must have been one of the carnivorous dinosaurs out hunting. The allosaurus, perhaps,’ said Challenger, looking at the marks left by savage teeth and claws.

‘Or the megalosaurus,’ suggested Summerlee.

‘Indeed,’ conceded Challenger. ‘We should be grateful that, apart from in this isolated spot, the dinosaurs died out long before human beings arrived on earth. We would have little with which to defend ourselves against such beasts. Even our rifles would be useless.’

We continued our exploration and saw many wonderful things that day. When we got back to camp we started to make plans for where we would go next, but Summerlee, who had been in a bad mood since that morning, said irritably: ‘What we *ought* to be doing is finding some way out of this trap.’

‘I am surprised, sir,’ boomed Challenger, stroking his beard. ‘I never expected a man of science would want to miss the chance to study such a fascinating place.’

‘Our mission,’ said Summerlee, ‘was to test your claims. We have tested them and found you spoke the truth. We now must return and let others know.’

We agreed with Summerlee but also said it was a shame we weren’t able to make a map of the plateau to take back with us. I then had an idea. The tree in the middle of our camp was enormous. If I climbed it, I’d be able to see for miles and would be able to draw a map of what I saw.

‘By George, young fellah, what a capital idea!’ exclaimed Lord John.

I blushed with pride. I was an excellent tree-climber and I was soon high up among the branches. I was about halfway to the top, however, when I nearly fell out of the tree with surprise. I had come nose-to-nose with an ape with an almost human face. The face was long, white, blotched with pimples and had coarse bristles on its chin. The ape-man glared at me then darted from view.

I almost decided I should climb back down again because I was so shocked, but managed to carry on. When I reached the top I took out my notebook and spyglass, and made a sketch of the view before me. In the centre of the plateau was a large lake – I named it Lake Gladys on my map – with wooded slopes leading down to it on three sides. On the side facing me, however, there was a steep cliff dotted with caves.

My companions congratulated me when I got back down again. I was still feeling proud of myself later that night, when Summerlee was on watch and the others asleep. I decided I would go for a walk to Lake Gladys in the moonlight. The others would be very impressed with me when they heard about my adventure, I thought. Summerlee was a useless guard – he was dozing over his pipe – so I was able to get by him without him noticing me.

Once I was outside I regretted my rashness. I remembered the dreadful cry and the torn flesh of last night's dinosaur hunt. But I was stubborn and forced myself to go on. After several hours in which I was alternately full of fear and full of wonder, I reached the lake and spent some time watching all the activity there. I noticed that there were lights in the caves in the cliff opposite. They were the lights of fires! So humans *did* live here, after all.

When my watch said it was gone two o'clock I headed back to camp. I was thinking of all the amazing things I had seen when suddenly I remembered the danger I was in. I heard a strange noise behind me. I started to run but the noise came louder and closer than before. There was no doubt now: something was chasing me. I changed direction, running along a new path, but the beast was at my heels, crashing and thudding through the undergrowth. In the moonlight I could see a row of enormous teeth in its open mouth and the gleaming claws on its powerful forearms. I screamed with terror as it sprang towards me and then I was falling in space and all was darkness.



▶▶ YOU KNOW...

... that of all the species that have ever lived on earth, over 99 per cent are now **extinct**? Extinction happens for lots of different reasons. Sometimes it happens because of something that humans do. This picture is of the great auk. This was a large, flightless bird that lived on islands in the Atlantic Ocean. It was hunted to extinction in the nineteenth century.

NEW WORDS

agony	pain
blazing	on fire
blotched	marked
capital	old-fashioned word for 'great'
carnivorous	meat-eating
conceded	agreed
isolated	cut off
lunged	charged at
mission	task
rashness	recklessness
spring	jump
spyglass	like a telescope
stubborn	refusing to change
undergrowth	low bushes

PUZZLE

Make six sentences about what happens in this chapter. Each sentence has one phrase each from columns 1, 2 and 3.

1	2	3
Malone climbed up	to escape	in the caves.
Everyone was	to the lake	to draw a map.
The iguandons	the lights of fires	in the moonlight.
Malone walked	into the tree	by another dinosaur.
Summerlee wanted	woken by the	from the plateau.
Malone could see	were attacked	sound of screams.

GET CREATIVE

In this chapter Malone feels proud, surprised, afraid and amazed, among other things. Imagine you are Malone. Write a short poem about some of the emotions you feel.