

Sundown

Level 6

“Watch out, boy!”

Peter spun around just in time to pull his heavy apple cart out of the way as a large horse drawn carriage went speeding past. Puffing heavily, Peter rested his heavy fruit cart by the side of the dusty track. It had been a big day, and Peter was exhausted.

It was getting late, and Peter knew it wasn't safe to be out after sundown.

There were many stories about a monster that prowled the nearby forest. The most recent encounter was two nights earlier. The town baker was closing up his shop when a loud growl from the other side of the wall sent him running. From his upstairs window, he watched as the beast prowled the perimeter of the town's wall. The townsfolk of Old Norwich lived in constant fear of the monster breaching the perimeter. The wall was old and crumbling and didn't offer the protection it once did.

Peter knew he had no time to waste. He had one stop to make in the town marketplace before he could return home for supper. Clipping his flask back on his belt, he took a deep breath and gave the cart a sharp tug to get it moving.



The sun had just dipped below the horizon as Peter set the cart down in front of Arthur's fruit shop. He quickly unloaded the last of the fruit. He usually felt relief at the end of a day's work, but today he felt anxious. The street was now almost empty. A scattering of people was running here and there, packing up their stalls and locking windows and doors. He saw Mrs Alice ushering her two children inside their house. Peter realised he was later than usual and began walking quickly home. The air was still warm, but a shiver went through Peter's body. He knew it was unsafe to be out this late.

As he rounded the final corner to his house, Peter saw Simon carrying a pail of water back from the well. The well wasn't far from their house, but his brother knew better than that. It was too dangerous to risk being so careless!

At that very moment, Peter heard an unmistakeable and terrifying sound behind him.

“Simon!” Peter shouted at the top of his lungs without turning around. “Run inside and warn Mother!”

Simon screamed and dashed inside the family's small wooden house.



For a split moment, Peter thought about running in after Simon, but it was too dangerous. The monster had seen its prey disappear into their small wooden house. The beast would surely make short work of their door. No, Peter had to lure the creature away. Making sure he had the monster's attention, he turned away from his house and set off in a run.

A daring idea suddenly struck Peter. He knew where to lead this beast so it would never be able to terrorise Old Norwich again. Peter ran towards Emerald Gorge, looking back frequently to make sure he was still being followed. He had to slow down on more than one occasion.

Peter reached the gorge. The bridge that crossed it had once been a busy gateway into the town, but a terrible storm last summer had rendered the bridge unsafe. Peter gulped as he stared down at the treads on the rickety bridge. Holding the rope handrails, Peter leaned over the first wooden tread and looked down the deep gorge. The full moon provided just enough light to see down to the shallow stream of water. Peter was suddenly less confident in his plan than he had been at the house, but he had no choice now.

Another murderous growl thundered from the beast. Peter mustered all of his courage and took one step onto the bridge. Then another, and another. Peter turned around to face the deadly creature.

Without slowing down, the monster stepped onto the bridge. The timber treads groaned under its weight. Peter stood there, heart beating and legs shaking. Closer and closer the monster came. Peter could almost feel its breath.

Suddenly, the bridge broke beneath its feet. Peter clasped the rails firmly in his hands and watched as the beast began to plummet towards the valley below, screaming as it fell.

Peter breathed a sigh of relief. He had done it. Desperate to be standing once again on solid ground, he hopped carefully back over the broken tread and then stepped back onto the earth. Peter began the walk home. His family was safe and the town was safe, but he would still have to talk to his brother.



Questions

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1. Where does Peter live? _____

2. What does the word 'breaching' mean?

3. What two clues are given to show Peter knew what the growl was as soon as he heard it?

4. What does the word 'ushering' mean?

5. Why was Peter feeling anxious after unloading the apples?

6. Why didn't Peter run and hide in his house when he saw the monster?

7. Peter slowed down on his way to the gorge. Why?

8. Why did Peter become less confident in his plan when he got to the gorge?

Answers

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1. Where does Peter live? **Peter lives in Old Norwich.**

2. What does the word 'breaching' mean?

'Breaching' means breaking through.

3. What two clues are given to show Peter knew what the growl was as soon as he heard it?

The author said it was an 'unmistakable sound', and without turning around to look at what made the noise, Peter told his brother to run inside.

4. What does the word 'ushering' mean?

'Ushering' means guiding.

5. Why was Peter feeling anxious after unloading the fruit at Arthur's?

Peter felt anxious because he knew it was getting late and it wasn't safe to be out after sundown.

6. Why didn't Peter run and hide in his house when he saw the monster?

He knew that would put his family in danger because the monster could follow him, and his house didn't offer much protection.

7. Peter slowed down on his way to the gorge. Why?

Peter slowed down because he was running too fast for the monster, and he needed the monster to follow him.

8. Why did Peter become less confident in his plan when he got to the gorge?

Peter became less confidence because he was unsure whether the bridge would even support his weight. Peter was also intimidated by the depth of the gorge.

