

A Hanging Head.

Recently I've had the strangest feeling when I've been alone at home. My husband is at work, and my children are at school, so I should be alone. I don't hear footsteps(1), or anyone moving around in the house. I don't hear talking or breathing in any of the rooms. But I sense that someone else is in the house, or something else. When I'm upstairs, folding laundry in the laundry room, I feel it less. But as I walk downstairs, I become aware(2) of a presence, gradually with each step. As I write this, I'm in the living room, where the feeling is strongest. It reminds(3) me of when I was a girl, and I would stare up at the ceiling at night, in my room, in the darkness. My imagination would make me see all sorts of things up there, or coming out of the walls. Shadows of toys would become people or creatures, fairies and figures. So, here I sit, and it feels as if a pair of (4) eyes is watching me. Something has made its place in here, silently. And, as I sit here writing, I can feel that it is directly above me. Should I turn and look? Am I brave enough to reach out to touch it? Yes, I will. And I do. My fingers immediately feel something very large, cool, and smooth. The more I touch, the bigger it appears. Its body goes up and up. It feels strong, and what's that? It's not skin, but fur(5), and lots of it. In fact, it's completely covered in fur. Up my hand goes to its face. A long snout, and big bulging eyes, those eyes that never close. I feel a small forehead. This creature has a small brain for such a big, strong body. Large, hairy ears are alert at the sides of the head, listening for danger. This creature is wanted. This creature was wanted. Its powerful legs weren't enough for it to get away. It was wanted for its crown; and what a magnificent crown it is, unique, impressive, a crown of battle. It was a guardian(6) of the forest. And now it is here, still a guardian, quiet, watchful, always alert. It was barely seen among the trees, a passing shadow. And here, it's barely noticed, until you are alone. Then, you hear a whisper from the forest, you read its story in its eyes, and you feel the glory of its crown.

1. 'Footsteps' can be heard. 'Footprints' can be seen.
 - a. I knew that he had arrived because I heard his footsteps in the entryway.
 - b. I followed the footprints in the sand and found where you were.
2. 'To be aware' of something is to know or recognize.
 - a. I was suddenly aware of being followed by a man in a long, black coat and hat.
 - b. I wasn't aware that they had moved to the city.
3. 'To remind' or 'to be reminded' is very similar to remembering.
 - a. She reminds me of her grandmother; they look and act the same.
 - b. Please remind me that the pie is in the oven, otherwise I'll forget and it'll get burned.
4. 'A pair of' is singular, so the verb form used with it is the same.
 - a. That pair of shoes is too expensive.
 - b. That pair of socks isn't the right color. You need to wear this pair with those trousers.
5. 'Fur' is a kind of coarse hair that animals have.
 - a. There is something furry moving through the trees.
 - b. Native American Indians would use the fur and skins of animals for clothing.
6. 'Guardian' comes from the verb 'to guard'. We don't pronounce the 'u'.
 - a. He was the guardian of the temple, and had to protect it at any cost.
 - b. He takes his job as palace guardian very seriously.