

Chapter 3 The Midnight Visitor

Summary of Chapter 3: The Midnight Visitor

"The Midnight Visitor" is a short story by Robert Arthur that revolves around Ausable, a secret agent, and how he outsmarts his enemy, Max.

Ausable is an intelligence agent, but unlike the typical spies in stories, he is fat, slow-moving, and speaks with a strong American accent. One evening, he is visited by a young writer named Fowler, who is eager to meet a real-life spy. However, Fowler is disappointed because Ausable does not fit the image of an exciting, adventurous spy.

As they enter Ausable's hotel room, they find a dangerous situation waiting for them—Max, another secret agent, is inside holding a gun. Max demands an important report related to missiles, which he believes Ausable has. Despite the threat, Ausable remains calm and cleverly deceives Max. He talks about a balcony outside his window, which Max believes to be real. When there is a sudden knock on the door, Ausable tricks Max into thinking it is the police. In panic, Max tries to escape through the imaginary balcony and falls to his doom.

Ausable's intelligence and presence of mind save him from danger without any violence. The story highlights how quick thinking and wit are more powerful than physical strength.

READ AND FIND OUT

Q 1: How is Ausable different from other secret agents?

Ans 1: Ausable stood out from other secret agents mainly because of his appearance—he was quite overweight, slow-moving, and somewhat disheveled. However, beneath this exterior lay a keen and intelligent mind, exceptional presence of mind, and a calm demeanor—all essential qualities for an effective spy.

Q 2. Who is Fowler and what is his first authentic thrill of the day?

Ans 2: Fowler, a young romantic writer, was eager to explore the intriguing world of espionage. To do this, he decided to meet Ausable, a seasoned spy. When Ausable turned on the lights in his room, Fowler was taken aback to find a man with a pointed pistol waiting for him. This encounter provided Fowler with his first genuine thrill of the day.

READ AND FIND OUT

Q 1. How has Max got in?

Ans 1: Max entered the room by using a passkey to unlock Ausable's door.

Q 2. How does Ausable say he got in?

Ans 2: Ausable explains that he entered the room by way of the balcony from the neighboring apartment.

THINK ABOUT IT

Q 1. "Ausable did not fit any description of a secret agent Fowler had ever read." What do secret agents in books and films look like, in your opinion? Discuss in groups or in class some stories or movies featuring

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spies, detectives and secret agents, and compare their appearance with that of Ausable in this story. (You may mention characters from fiction in languages other than English. In English fiction you may have come across Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, or Miss Marple. Have you watched any movies featuring James Bond?)

Ans 1: The secret agents I've encountered in fiction and film are often portrayed as captivating and charismatic characters. Typically, they are slim, agile, and youthful individuals, known for their intelligence and quick thinking. These agents can deftly handle various situations, expertly wield all types of weapons, and operate a wide range of vehicles, including airplanes. They excel in physical skills such as jumping, climbing, running, and fighting, often taking on multiple adversaries alone to accomplish their missions.

In contrast, Ausable does not fit this typical image of a secret agent. He is quite overweight, slow, and somewhat disheveled in appearance. However, he possesses all the essential qualities of an effective spy. Ausable is sharp-minded and resourceful, capable of manipulating circumstances to his advantage. His cleverness is evident in how he outsmarted Max and eliminated the threat he posed.

Q 2. How does Ausable manage to make Max believe that there is a balcony attached to his room? Look back at his detailed description of it. What makes it a convincing story?

Ans 2: Ausable's vivid description of the balcony, along with the elaborate story he creates around it, contributes to the believability of his narrative. His frustration with the manager for ignoring his complaint is palpable, particularly when he states, "This is the second time in a month that someone has entered my room through that troublesome balcony." These elements combine to make his account of the balcony seem both convincing and credible.

Q 3. Looking back at the story, when do you think Ausable thought up his plan for getting rid of Max? Do you think he had worked out his plan in detail right from the beginning? Or did he make up a plan taking advantage of events as they happened?

Ans 3: Ausable came up with his plan to eliminate Max when he found him in his room. While he displayed some surprise at Max's presence, he remained calm and composed. With a clear mind, he quickly formulated a strategy to handle the situation. His approach involved suggesting that Max escape and then intimidating him to force that escape.

Ausable had arranged for drinks to be delivered to his room, expecting the waiter to arrive at any moment. He planned to use this situation to frighten Max by claiming that he had called the police for added security, knowing Max would want to avoid any encounter with them.

To create a believable scenario, Ausable fabricated a story about the balcony. He told Max that someone had entered his room through that balcony multiple times in the past month, expressing his frustration over the management's failure to address his complaints. It was dark outside, which allowed Ausable to subtly suggest to Max that the balcony was an easy escape route.

Just then, a knock at the door signaled the arrival of the waiter. Ausable told Max that it was likely the police coming to provide protection. This threat terrified Max, prompting him to jump through the window onto the so-called balcony, ultimately leading to his demise.

In conclusion, it's clear that Ausable had meticulously planned his actions from the very beginning.

TALK ABOUT IT

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Q 1. In this story, Ausable shows great 'presence of mind' or the ability to think quickly, and act calmly and wisely, in a situation of danger and surprise. Give examples from your own experience, or narrate a story which shows someone's presence of mind.

Ans 1: Last summer, while my parents were away attending a family wedding, my uncle and I decided to go out for dinner and catch a late-night movie. When we returned home, we were taken aback to see lights on in our bedroom. I wondered if my parents had come back early without letting us know. They could have called us on my uncle's mobile if that were the case, and the front door was still locked. This raised our suspicions—perhaps there were burglars inside.

We approached the bedroom quietly, straining to hear what was happening. We could hear muffled voices followed by the sound of someone trying to force open a cupboard. Fear gripped me, and I almost yelled out, but my uncle motioned for me to stay silent. He quietly slipped around to the back of the house, where we noticed the back door was slightly ajar.

With great care, he closed and secured the door before returning to me. He quickly called the police, and within minutes, the response team arrived. They managed to trap the thieves inside the house. My uncle then unlocked the door for the police, who arrested the burglars.

Thanks to my uncle's quick thinking and presence of mind, we were able to avoid a robbery.

Q 2. Discuss what you would do in the situations described below. Remember that presence of mind comes out of a state of mental preparedness. If you have thought about possible problems or dangers, and about how to act in such situations, you have a better chance of dealing with such situations if they do arise.

1. A small fire starts in your kitchen.
2. A child starts to choke on a piece of food.
3. An electrical appliance starts to hiss and gives out sparks.
4. A bicycle knocks down a pedestrian.
5. It rains continuously for more than twenty-four hours.
6. A member of your family does not return home at the usual or expected time.

You may suggest other such situations.

Ans 2:

(1) To handle a kitchen fire safely, start by disconnecting the gas cylinder. Then, either pour water on the flames or use the fire extinguisher that's kept in your kitchen.

(2) Putting its head down I will stroke his back.

(3) "I will promptly turn off the electrical device and unplug it from the socket."

(4) "I'll assist the pedestrian in getting back on their feet and walking a few steps. If they appear to be hurt or injured, I will take them to the nearest doctor for help."

(5) It all depends on where I find myself during this time. If I'm at home, I'll take the opportunity to relax by watching TV, particularly catching up on the news. I also enjoy reading books and magazines, snacking, drinking, and getting some sleep.

However, if I'm stuck outside, like at work or school, my first step would be to call my family to let them know what's happening. If that's not possible, I would head to a nearby friend's or relative's house to stay safe and keep my family updated about my plans until the rain passes.

(6) First, I'll attempt to reach him by phone, assuming he has a mobile or landline at his location. If that doesn't work, I'll contact one of his colleagues who usually accompanies him to find out what might have caused the delay. Additionally, I'll check the radio for any reports of traffic jams on his route home.

If he's still not back and his friends have no idea where he went or when he left, and there is no traffic issues reported, I'll start to feel concerned. At that point, I'll call local hospitals to inquire about any accident cases. If necessary, I will also inform the police.