

The Midnight Visitor

Introduction

This story has been written by Robert Arthur. This story narrates an incident from the life of a secret agent and helps us get a glimpse on the dangers that they face in the course of their work.

Summary

Ausable was a secret agent. He was an American who worked in Paris. He had a room on the sixth and top floor of a gloomy French hotel. Fowler was a writer. He was young and romantic. He wished to meet Ausable to know something about the life of a secret agent.

Fowler was disappointed to meet Ausable because the latter had nothing special in him as a secret agent. Ausable was very fat. He used ordinary telephones to make calls. Even his room was quite small.

Both of them had spent a dull evening in a French music hall. Then, they went to Ausable's room. Ausable told Fowler that he should be cheerful as he was about to see something important. He was going to have hold of an important paper soon. That was a report for which several men and women had risked their lives. That report might well affect the course of history some day.

Ausable unlocked the door of his room and when Fowler was in, Ausable closed the door behind him and switched on the light. When there was light in the room, Fowler had a real thrill of the day. He saw a man standing at the centre of the room with a pistol in his hand. The other man was also a secret agent working for Germany. His name was Max. He demanded Ausable to hand him over the report concerning some new missiles.

Ausable sat on an armchair and said that he was really going to take the management of the hotel to task and make life hell for them. It was the second time in the month that somebody had got into the room through the balcony. He then explains that his room used to be a part of a large unit and the room next door used to be the living room. That room had a balcony which now extends under his window. Somebody had entered his room through that balcony last month and he had informed the management about it. The management had promised to block that balcony but they had done nothing. Max told him that he didn't come through the balcony. He had a passkey, which he had used to access Ausable's room. He then asks Fowler to sit down as they have to wait for half an hour for the arrival of the report. Suddenly, there was a knock at the door of the room. Fowler jumped at the sudden knocking. Ausable said that the police were at the door. He had asked them to check on him to make sure everything was all right because the report was very important. Ausable asked Max what he would do then. Max was nervous. Meanwhile, there was another knock. Max asked Ausable to send the police back. He left hurriedly for the balcony.

Max came on the window sill and dropped himself down. He screamed shrilly because there was no balcony. Max had jumped down on the road below.

The door opened and a waiter entered with a tray of drink. There was no police.

Ausable had concocted the story of balcony and the police, to get rid of Max.

Message

This story conveys the message that physical strength does not matter. A person's mental strength and presence of mind can help him tide over difficult situations.



Extract Based Questions

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow:

1. And as the light came on, Fowler had his first authentic thrill of the day. For halfway across the room, a small automatic pistol in his hand, stood a man.

(a) What did Fowler see?

(b) State whether the given statement is True or False.

Ausable was standing in the room with a pistol.

(c) Fowler had his first authentic thrill of the day. Explain.

(d) Complete the analogy with a word from the extract:
automatic : manual :: false:

Answers

(a) Fowler saw a man with a small automatic pistol in his hand.

(b) False

(c) Fowler was disappointed to meet Ausable as he had nothing special in him as a secret agent. Both of them had spent a dull evening in a French music hall. When they reached Ausable's room and Ausable switched on the light, Fowler saw a man standing in the room with a pistol in his hand.

(d) authentic

2. And then there was his accent. Though he spoke French and German passably, he had never altogether lost the American accent he had brought to Paris from Boston twenty years ago.

(a) Who is 'he' here?

(i) Max

(ii) Ausable

(iii) Fowler

(iv) The author

(b) Why did Fowler want to meet Ausable?

(c) At present, he had a room in:

(i) a German hotel

(ii) an American hotel

(iii) a French hotel

(iv) a Russian hotel

(d) Give a word which can correctly substitute 'Passably', in the given sentence from the extract.

Though he spoke French and German passably,....



Answers

- (a) (ii) Ausable
(b) Fowler was a young and romantic writer. He wanted to meet Ausable because he wanted to know something about the life of a secret agent.
(c) (iii) a French hotel
(d) Reasonably
3. "You can get onto it from the empty room two doors down — and somebody did, last month. The management promised to block it off. But they haven't."
(a) Who is the speaker here?
(b) State whether the given statement is True or False.
'It' here refers to the balcony.
(c) About what the speaker is talking and why?
(d) Complete the analogy with a word from the extract:
last : previous :: vacant:

Answers

- (a) Ausable is the speaker here.
(b) True
(c) The speaker is talking about the balcony which is not there in reality. He invents the story of a balcony so that Max can be tempted to use it.
(d) empty

Short Answer Type Questions

Q 1. How is Ausable different from other secret agents? (CBSE 2019)

Ans. Ausable did not fit the description of a typical secret agent. He was very fat. He spoke French and German with a slight American accent. He used ordinary telephones to make calls. He lived in a mediocre French hotel. This way, he did not fit the description of any secret agent.

Q 2. What did Ausable say to Fowler while walking towards the room?

Ans. While walking towards the room, Ausable said to Fowler, "You were disappointed as you are told that I was a secret agent, dealing in espionage. You are a writer, young and romantic. You envisioned mysterious figures in the night, the crack of pistols, etc. But, now you are disillusioned."

Q 3. Describe Max as a secret agent. (CBSE 2023)

Ans. Max was a secret agent, a rival and enemy of Ausable. He was slender and a little less than tall. He appeared crafty and had pointed countenance of a fox. There was nothing especially menacing about him except his pistol.

Q 4. State one likely reason the writer of 'The Midnight Visitor' chose to characterise Ausable as short and fat. (CBSE SQP 2022-23)

Ans. The writer of 'The Midnight Visitor' characterised Ausable as short and fat because he wanted to draw

the attention of the readers towards Ausable's wits and mental ability to handle any grave situation. It seems that he wanted to give a strong message that the brain is what counts more than muscle power.

Q 5. Why did Max enter Ausable's room? How did he do so?

Ans. Max entered Ausable's room to intimidate him and to take away the important report concerning new missiles. Max had a duplicate key of Ausable's room. He opened the room with the help of that key and gained entry in Ausable's room.

Q 6. What were the reactions of Ausable, Max and Fowler when they heard a knock at the door?

Ans. Ausable showed surprise, but Fowler and Max were frightened to hear the knocking at the door. Fowler jumped after hearing it. Max's face had become red. He was nervous. Ausable thought a plan and told them that it was the police who had come to check whether he was alright or not.

Q 7. What happened to Max when he jumped from the window?

Ans. Ausable made Max believe that the police was knocking at the door. He had also told him that there was a balcony below the window. So, Max jumped from the window without examining. He cried loudly and fell down to the ground from the sixth floor.

Q 8. How did Ausable show his presence of mind to get rid of the intruder?

OR

How did Ausable get rid of Max without using a weapon? (CBSE 2023)

Ans. Ausable was an intelligent spy who handled Max cleverly. He made Max believe that he was scared on finding him inside his room with a pistol in his hand. He made up a story of a balcony under his window. When there was a knock at the door, he convinced Max that it was police, though it was a waiter. Max got scared and jumped into the non-existent balcony to death. Thus, Ausable outsmarted Max by his presence of mind.

Q 9. The various elements of Robert Arthur's writing style work together to create a sense of tension, uncertainty, and suspense, well-suited to the mystery and suspense genre of the story, 'The Midnight Visitor'. Comment, with reference to any one element. (CBSE SQP 2023-24)

Ans. The author employs various elements of writing style to create a sense of tension, uncertainty, and suspense, well-suited to the story's mystery and suspense genre. He makes skilful use of language to create tension. Throughout the story, he employs short, punchy sentences that create a sense of urgency and a feeling that events are unfolding quickly and unpredictably. This helps to build momentum and keep the reader engaged, while also conveying a sense of unease and urgency.

Long Answer Type Questions

Q 1. Why did Fowler want to meet Ausable? Why was he disappointed?

Ans. Fowler was a young and romantic writer. He wanted to meet Ausable because he had imagined that a secret agent was tall, lithe and handsome and led an exciting life with mysterious figures in the night, the crack of pistols, drugs in wine and messages being slipped into his hand by dark-eyed beauties. But, Fowler was disappointed because Ausable was nothing like the stereotype of agent that Fowler had imagined. For one thing, he was very fat. He spoke with an American accent. Fowler had to spend a dull evening with him in a French Music Hall where he only got a prosaic telephone call making an appointment in his room.

Q 2. What is the significance of the balcony in 'The Midnight Visitor'?

Ans. The balcony or rather the absence of the balcony is of utmost significance in the story 'The Midnight Visitor'. Ausable invents the story of a balcony so that Max could be tempted to use it. When there is a knock at the door, Ausable informs Max that the police has arrived to check whether he is safe or not. On hearing this, Max decides to wait on the balcony which as described by Ausable was just below the window, while Ausable sends the police away. So, he jumps from the window, thinking that he will land on the balcony below. But, in reality, there was no balcony and he falls from the sixth floor to the ground below. So, Ausable's story about the balcony prevents important documents from reaching enemy's hands.

Q 3. What impression do you form of Ausable from the lesson 'The Midnight Visitor'?

Ans. Ausable is a secret agent. But he does not look like the stereotype of a secret agent that we have in our mind—a tall, handsome and dashing man. Rather, he is very fat and not much tall. But he is much alert in his mind. Actually, he uses his mind to maximum. He has an important report on missiles. Max enters his room with an automatic pistol to take that report. Ausable is not nervous. He is cool. He tells that he would ask the hotel authorities to close the 'balcony' outside the single window. People enter his room through that 'balcony'. But, there is no such 'balcony'. Then, a waiter knocks at the door. Ausable informs Max that it is the police. However, he knows the truth. Max believes him and jumps from the window to the balcony below. But there is no balcony there and he falls on the ground from the sixth floor. This proves that Ausable is not only intelligent but also a very clever secret agent. He has great presence of mind and he remains calm and composed even in the most adverse circumstances.

Q 4. Ausable says to Fowler, 'he won't return'. Explain with reference to the context.

Ans. Ausable was a secret agent. Fowler had come to meet him as he wanted to know how a real agent worked. Ausable took Fowler to his room on the sixth floor of a small, gloomy French hotel. Some important documents were to be delivered to him. When they entered the room, they saw a man with an automatic pistol, aiming at them. Ausable recognised him as Max. Max had come to take an important report on new missiles from Ausable. Ausable immediately thought about a plan. He said that he was really going to take the management of the hotel to task and make life hell for them. It was the second time in the month that somebody had got into the room through the balcony. He then explains that his room used to be a part of a large unit and the room next door used to be the living room. That room had a balcony which now extends under his window. Somebody had entered his room through that balcony last month and he had informed the management about it. The management had promised to block that balcony but they had done nothing.

Then there was a knock at the door. Ausable says to Max that the police has arrived as he had asked them to regularly check on him. In spite of knowing that there was a waiter on the door with drinks that he had ordered. On learning that there were cops at the door, Max decides to wait on the balcony. So, he jumps from the window, thinking that he would land on the balcony below. But there was no balcony, and he fell straight on the ground below. Therefore, Ausable says to Fowler that Max will not return.

Q 5. Sometimes, appearances can be very deceptive. How does this statement prove with the story 'The Midnight Visitor'?

Ans. Yes, it is true that sometimes appearances can be deceptive. Fowler was a young and romantic writer. Ausable was a secret agent, a detective. So, Fowler wanted to meet Ausable. He had imagined that he would encounter mysterious figures during night and hear the crack of pistols. But when he met Ausable in a gloomy French hotel Fowler felt disappointed. Ausable was a sloppy fat man who was spending a dull evening in a French music hall. He felt that Ausable led an uninteresting and unadventurous life. But Fowler was in for a surprise. A man named Max was inside Ausable's room with a pistol in his hand. Ausable at once proved that he possessed qualities of a true detective. He told him about a balcony below the window and about police knocking at the door. Max believed him and jumped from the window thinking that there is a balcony below, but falls to the ground. So, a fat and sloppy man had been able to outsmart his opponent without as much as lifting his finger. So, this proves the statement that looks can be very deceptive.



Q 6. We need intelligence more than physical strength in a difficult situation. Explain with reference to 'The Midnight Visitor'.

Ans. There is no doubt that intelligence is more essential than physical strength to get out of a difficult situation. Ausable, an unimpressive and unassuming man, had totally disappointed Fowler because of his appearance. Ausable did not fit into the description of a secret agent because he was fat and looked sluggish. But Ausable's alertness and presence of mind, were unmatched. He was able to outsmart his opponent without as much as lifting his finger. His intelligence proved to Fowler that appearance can be misleading and one can never judge a person on the basis of his looks.

Q 7. How does Ausable manage to make Max believe that there is a balcony attached to his room? What makes it a convincing story?

Ans. When Ausable found Max waiting in his room with a pistol in his hand, he sat down on an armchair and said that he was really going to take the management of the hotel to task and make life hell for them. It was the second time in the month that somebody had got into the room through the balcony. He then explains that his room used to be a part of a large unit and the room next door used to be the living room. That room had a balcony which now extends under his window. Somebody had entered his room through that balcony last month and he had informed the management about it. The management had promised to block that balcony but they had done nothing. His irritation, his anger and his vivid description makes his story convincing.

