

Chapter Review

- "The Midnight Visitor" is a spy story by Robert Arthur. Ausable is a secret agent who lives on the sixth floor of a Paris hotel.
- Fowler, a young writer, visits him in his room. Ausable is a fat, sloppy man with a weird American accent, quite unlike a spy in books.
- Ausable says a rival agent called Max is coming for a secret paper (a document of an important plan). He asks Fowler to leave, but the door opens and Max is there.
- Max, with a pistol, demands the secret papers Ausable has. Ausable stays calm and does not panic.
- Ausable says there is a balcony outside the window, and that someone has already entered through it twice. He tells Max that the police have been informed.
- A knock is heard, and Ausable says it is the police. Max panics, runs to the window and jumps onto the balcony, which doesn't exist. His fall is from the sixth floor.
- Fowler is stunned. Ausable explains that he had used his wit: he made up the story of the balcony. His room is on the sixth floor with no balcony.
- Ausable shows his presence of mind and cleverness, and Fowler realises that Ausable is a real secret agent, not a conventional one.

Key Terms

Secret agent – A spy working secretly for a government.

Musty – Smelling old and damp.

Automatic – A pistol that fires repeatedly.

Balcony – A platform projecting from a building.

Presence of mind – Ability to think and act quickly.

Grimly – In a serious manner.

Passkey – A key that opens many locks.

Hysterical – Out of control with fear or excitement.

Diagrams / Flowcharts

The Balcony Trick



Ausable vs Typical Spy

Typical Spy

- Tall, handsome
- Gets secret messages from beautiful girls
- Hi-tech gadgets

Ausable

- Fat, sloppy, weird accent
- Routine telephone call
- Uses only wits

About the Author

- Robert Arthur (1909-1969) was an American writer of detective and mystery stories.

Theme / Message

- Presence of mind can save us in danger. Appearances are deceptive: a ordinary-looking man can be the most clever.

- The story is also a mystery with a twist ending.

Compare with 'If I Were You'

- In that play, Gerrard also traps a criminal using wit and confidence. Both show that wits beat weapons.

Textbook Exercise Questions

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

Ans. He was a sloppy fat man with a weird accent, living in a gloomy hotel room. He spoke French and German poorly after twenty years in Paris. He got only a routine telephone call, not secret messages from beautiful girls.

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

Ans. Fowler is a young romantic writer visiting Ausable. His first thrill was when he saw an unknown man pointing an automatic pistol at him and Ausable.

Q.3 How has Max got in?

Ans. With a passkey or master key.

Q.4 How does Ausable say he got in?

Ans. Ausable said Max must have come through the balcony, the second time in a month.

Q.5 What do secret agents in books and films look like? Compare with Ausable.

Ans. They are tall, dark, handsome gentlemen, with gadgets and beautiful women, like James Bond or Feluda. Ausable is fat, sloppy and ordinary.

Q.6 How does Ausable make Max believe there is a balcony?

Ans. He gave a detailed description of a larger apartment and a balcony and said an earlier break-in took place through it. His calm manner made it convincing.

Q.7 When did Ausable think up his plan?

Ans. He did not plan it in advance. He used the situation as it happened, and then the knock at the door increased Max's panic.

Q.8 Give an example of presence of mind.

Ans. In 'If I Were You', Gerrard traps a criminal in a cupboard by pretending the cupboard door is the exit.

Board Exam Questions (Important)

Q.1 Write a character sketch of Ausable. (100 words)

Ans. Ausable is an American secret agent in Paris, sloppy and fat with a strange accent. He looks nothing like a spy. But he is calm, quick-witted and brave. When a pistol is pointed at him, he invents a balcony and uses it to defeat Max. He proves that wits are more powerful than weapons.

Q.2 What is the twist at the end of the story?

Ans. There is no balcony. Max, a trained agent, was tricked into jumping to his death. Even Fowler realises how clever Ausable is.

Q.3 Reference to context: "The only balcony... that nuisance of a balcony."
Why does Ausable keep speaking about it?

Ans. He wants to make Max believe in it, so that Max will try to escape by it when the police 'arrive'.

Q.4 Value-based: Why is presence of mind important? What would you do if a small fire started in the kitchen?

Ans. It helps us act calmly in danger. For a kitchen fire, switch off the gas or electricity, cover the fire with a blanket and call for help.

