

## Chapter 3: The Midnight Visitor

## Read and Find Out

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## Question: 1

How is Ausable different from other secret agents?

(or)

What great qualities made Ausable a successful secret agent? (CBSE 2013)

(or)

How was Ausable different from other secret agents? (CBSE 2011)

(or)

How is Ausable different from other secret agents? How does he deal with Max? (CBSE 2012)

## Answer:

Ausable is different from other secret agents in more ways than one. He has a small room in the musty corridor of a gloomy French hotel. It was on the sixth and top floor and it was scarcely the setting for a romantic adventure. He was extremely fat. In spite of living in Paris for over twenty years, he spoke French and German with difficulty and had an American accent. Instead of getting messages passed secretly to him by beautiful girls, he got only a routine telephone call making an appointment. In these ways, he was different from the conventional notion of a secret agent.

He dealt with Max by inventing some stories and convincing Max to act on them, so that he could get rid of Max permanently.

## Question: 2

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

## Answer:

Fowler is a writer and he had come to meet Ausable. His first authentic thrill of the day came when he saw a man in Ausable's room pointing a pistol towards Ausable and himself.

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## Question: 3

How has Max got in?

## Answer:

Max had got into the room using a passkey or master key.

## Question: 4

How does Ausable say he got in?

## Answer:

Ausable said that he thought Max had got into the room through the balcony. He said that it was the second time in a month that somebody had got into his room this way.

## Think About It

## Question: 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 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?)

**Answer:**

Secret agents in fiction are projected like ideal men, 'Tall dark and handsome'. They are usually well-built and keep beautiful women for company. They would smoke a pipe (like Sherlock Holmes) or a cigar and execute death-defying stunts (like James Bond). Movies based on James Bond show hi-tech gadgets which assist the detective in countering villains. However, there are some exceptions to this appearance of a secret agent also. A character named Feluda was created by Satyajit Ray, the famous Bengali filmmaker. Feluda was a tall athletic figure who relied on his superb analytical ability and observation skill.

**Question: 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?**

**Answer:**

Ausable creates a detailed description of how his office was part a bigger apartment and how the next room had a direct connection with a balcony. His statement that . somebody else also broke into his office through that balcony earlier made it a convincing story. Ausable's ability to think quickly and calmly in a situation of panic makes it convincing.

**Question: 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?**

**Answer:**

No, I don't think that he had worked out his plan in detail earlier. He took advantage of events as they happened. Ausable made up a story of the balcony outside the room and as there was a knock at the door, he said that it would be the police. All these made Max desperate. He became restless and without seeing below, jumped out of the window.

**Talk About It**

**Question: 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.**

**Answer:**

This story refers to the play 'If I Were You'. Gerrard was held hostage by a criminal. However, Gerrard treated the criminal as a guest and trapped him with his confidence. He managed to convince the criminal to run away as the police is behind him. He told the criminal to run through the exit door, which was actually a cupboard door. The criminal exited through the door and was trapped in the cupboard.

**Question: 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.

**Answer:**

1. If a blanket is available, it should be put over the fire to shut out the air. If the fire is not due to an electrical problem, water can be thrown on it. If it is due to a short-circuit, electricity must be disconnected immediately from everything in the kitchen before taking any other measure.
2. The child's back must be thumped slowly until the piece of food stuck is vomited out. However, in case it continues, the child should be given trained medical aid immediately.
3. Electricity to the appliance should be immediately disconnected. If it is plugged into a socket, the plug must be removed from the socket. Later on the appliance may be got repaired by an authorised person.
4. First aid should be given to the pedestrian at once. Public help may also be asked, if necessary. Depending on the seriousness of the injury, the affected person may be shifted to hospital.
5. Flooding may be caused by a heavy downpour. So all necessary precautions for saving various possessions should be taken, besides informing the concerned authorities to take preventive action.
6. A family member not returning home at the usual time should be enquired for at the place he or she was expected to visit. If he or she was with friends, these friends or the friends' families should be contacted. If there is no result from these enquiries, as a last resort, the local police may be informed.