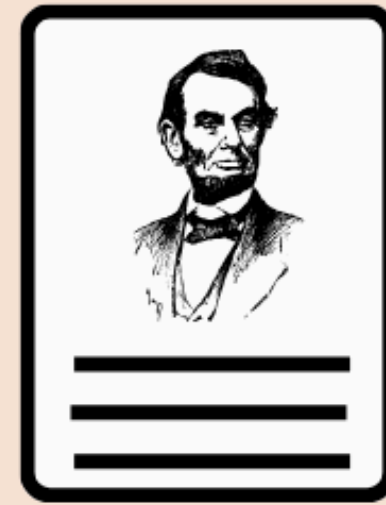


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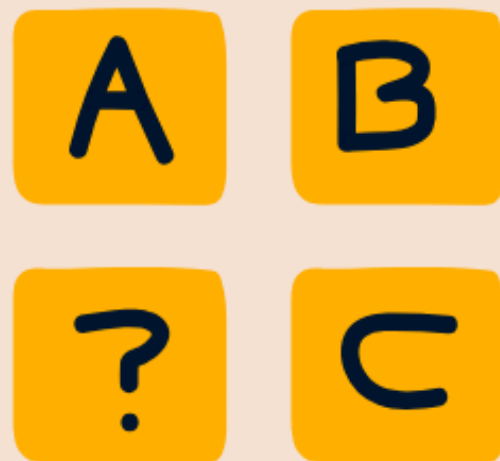
# English Notes



**Full  
Explanations**



**Character  
Sketch**



**Word  
Meanings**



**Tone, Central  
idea, devices....**

**Footprints without Feet**

## 3. The Midnight Visitor

### Chapter Explanation

Robert Arthur's "The Midnight Visitor" is a suspense-based story taking place in a dull **and gloomy** French hotel, where Fowler, a young writer, comes to meet Ausable, a secret agent. As both of them move through the **musty corridor** towards Ausable's room on the sixth and top floor, Fowler begins to feel disappointed because Ausable does not match the image of secret agents from exciting stories. He is fat, speaks with an American accent, and looks completely ordinary, which creates irony since a spy is expected to be smart-looking and adventurous, but here he appears quite **unromantic**. Ausable himself jokes about Fowler's expectations by mentioning "**mysterious figures,**" "**the crack of pistols,**" and "**drugs in the wine**"; this acts as imagery because it builds the kind of dramatic situation Fowler had imagined earlier.

But the simple evening quickly turns into real tension when Ausable opens the door and Fowler experiences his first real thrill. Inside the room stands Max, another secret agent, holding a small automatic pistol. Max is **slender and has a fox-like face**, and this comparison to a fox is an example of animal imagery, suggesting **cleverness** and cunning nature. He has come to steal a very important report about new missiles, which could even "**affect the course of history,**" increasing the seriousness of the situation. Fowler becomes stiff and frightened, while Ausable stays calm, showing his strong presence of mind and intelligence.

Ausable does not show panic. Instead, he creates a false story about a balcony outside the window and complains that people have used it before to enter. His explanation is **detailed enough** to sound real, which shows how carefully given details can make a lie believable. Soon, there is a knock on the door, and Ausable immediately says it must be the police, whom he had called for safety. This again becomes an example of irony, because in reality there are no police. Max, now nervous and feeling trapped, decides to hide in the balcony. He instructed Ausable to send the police back as he threatened to **take his chances** (engage in an armed battle). As the knocking increases, he climbs out of the window, expecting safety. Instead, he falls and disappears because no balcony actually exists.

The door finally opens, not to police, but to a waiter named Henry carrying drinks. Fowler, now white-faced and shocked, realises that Ausable has defeated Max not by force but by **intelligence**. The story ends with a twist, making Ausable more impressive – although he looked unlike a typical spy, he proves far more capable than the glamorous spies of fiction. The chapter shows that real courage lies in quick thinking, control, and sharp intelligence rather than appearance.

## Detailed Character Sketches

### Ausable:

Ausable is the main character and an unusual yet highly capable secret agent. Unlike typical spies, he is **fat**, speaks with a strong **American accent**, and appears ordinary. But behind this simple appearance lies a very sharp mind. Even when Max threatens him with a pistol, he remains calm and quickly creates the story of the balcony and police. His biggest strength is his presence of mind. Instead of using violence, he handles danger through intelligence and confidence. His final statement – “There is no balcony” – clearly proves his cleverness. Ausable shows that real heroism depends on intelligence rather than looks.

### Fowler:

Fowler is a young writer who represents the reader’s expectations. He is imaginative and **fascinated** by adventure. At first, he feels disappointed because Ausable does not match his idea of a secret agent. But as the story moves forward, he becomes frightened and shocked. He experiences his “first authentic thrill of the day” when he sees Max with a pistol. Fowler is important because his reactions help build suspense and highlight Ausable’s intelligence. By the end, he is left amazed, showing that his earlier assumptions were wrong.

### Max

Max is a rival secret agent and the midnight visitor. He is **slender** and has a “**crafty, pointed countenance of a fox,**” suggesting slyness. He enters secretly using a passkey and threatens Ausable with a pistol to steal a report. Although he appears confident, he lacks intelligence compared to Ausable. He becomes nervous when he hears about the police and blindly trusts the balcony story. His downfall is caused by **overconfidence and panic**. Thus, Max represents the weakness of relying only on force without thinking clearly.

## Central Message

The central message of “The Midnight Visitor” is that **presence of mind**, intelligence, and calm thinking are more powerful than physical strength or outward appearance. The story breaks stereotypes by showing that a real hero may look ordinary. It teaches that quick thinking can defeat even dangerous situations.

## Narrator’s Tone

The tone of the narrator is suspenseful, ironic, and slightly humorous. It remains suspenseful due to the presence of danger with Max. It is ironic because Ausable, who seems least suitable, turns out most capable. It is also humorous in the way Fowler’s expectations are subtly mocked.

## Word Meanings

1. Romantic – imaginative; unrealistic view of reality.
2. Passably – fairly well; tolerably.
3. Espionage – spying.
4. Sloppy – untidy.
5. Prosaic – ordinary; dull.
6. Chuckled – laughed softly.
7. Wheezed – spoke with heavy breathing.
8. Missiles – controlled weapons.
9. Shrilly – in a high-pitched voice.
10. Musty – stale-smelling.
11. Gloomy – dark and depressing.
12. Disillusioned – disappointed after reality.
13. Authentic – real.
14. Crafty – clever but tricky.
15. Menacing – threatening.
16. Passkey – master key.
17. Inflection – change in voice tone.
18. Explanatorily – in an explaining way.
19. Gestured – signalled by movement.
20. Grimly – seriously.
21. Deftly – skillfully.

## Reference Information:

1. **Setting of the story:** The story takes place in a gloomy French hotel, in Ausable's room on the sixth and top floor, creating a secretive and suspenseful atmosphere.
2. **Fowler's identity:** Fowler is a young writer with romantic ideas about spies and adventure, expecting Ausable to look like fictional agents.
3. **Ausable's unusual appearance:** Ausable is described as fat, very fat, and speaks French and German only passably, while having an American accent from Boston, making him appear unlike a typical spy.
4. **Importance of the report:** The report is about new missiles and is important enough to "affect the course of history," increasing tension.
5. **How Max entered the room:** Max entered using a passkey, but Ausable changes the situation by inventing the balcony story.

6. **The invented balcony story:** Ausable claims the balcony belongs to another apartment and can be accessed from a nearby empty room, making the lie believable due to detail.
7. **The knock at the door:** The knock becomes a major turning point, helping Ausable strengthen his lie about the police.
8. **Reality behind the knock:** The person is Henry the waiter, not the police.
9. **Cause of Max's fall:** Max jumps out believing in the balcony and to escape police, but falls because there is no balcony.
10. **Major conflict:** Man versus man conflict, but mainly intelligence versus force. Max has a pistol, yet Ausable wins through wit.
11. **Title significance:** The title "The Midnight Visitor" is suitable because Max arrives secretly at night, bringing danger and suspense.

### Key literary devices:

**Irony:** Ausable looks unlike a spy but proves brilliant; police never arrive though Max believes they will.

**Imagery:** "musty corridor," "gloomy French hotel," "night pressing blackly."

**Comparison/animal imagery:** Max compared to a fox, showing cunning.

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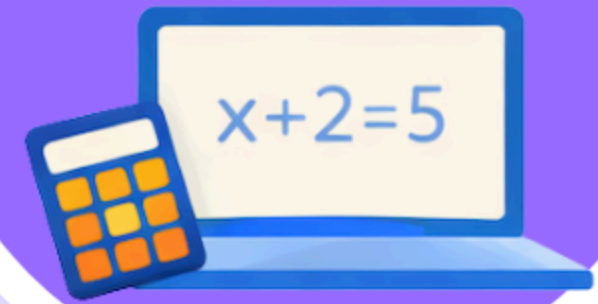
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