

Terror in the Night

Alain had been in bed for hours. He could not go to sleep, he was so excited by all the different things he had seen that day. Outside, a slight breeze puffed long streamers of white cloud across the sky. The sea scarcely stirred and all was so silent that he could hear the baby swallows chirping sleepily in their nest above his bedroom window.

He sat up suddenly. He was sure somebody was walking around the room. He stared into the darkness. No one. He lay down again and listened hard.

“Who’s that?” he called, his heart thumping.

It was not his imagination. Once more he had heard the slither of a foot in wooden floor. He was all the more frightened because it was light enough for him to have seen any intruder, and, hard as he stared, all he could make out were the now-familiar shapes of the furniture. He was throttled by fear. His thoughts were a mass of ghosts, of the newly-dead great-grandfather Loustalet, of the Monster of Vaccares which haunted the old cook’s stories. His mouth was dry, he swallowed hard and tried to convince himself that the noise he heard was the beating of his own heart. But the sound was so clear that he was soon forced to admit that it was a footstep. His hand shook as he switched on the light and jumped out of bed.

Alain had hardly moved towards the window when out of his own shoes leapt an enormous rat. It was a monster. Swift as an arrow, the rat ran around the room, jumped onto the bed and sat up on its hind legs right on the pillow.

Alain’s fear dissolved in anger. He did not know what to do. He looked at the rat and the rat looked at him. Its little eyes stared and glittered like two little pearls. Ought he to wake Marthe or his parents? How was he to get rid of this revolting creatures? Ignoring Alain completely, the rat began to wash its face with its paws. Its movements and its expressions were so comical that Alain could not help smiling, in spite of himself.

Where had this big fat rodent come from? Alain had not heard Marthe complain of the presence of rats in the home. He strongly suspected that Loustalets knew all about his adventure and this was all the more reason for not waking the rest of the house.

He tiptoed to the bedroom door and opened it wide. The rat seemed to read his mind. He had no need to point. The rat was out of the door and down the stairs with astonishing speed. Alain shut the door and went back to bed, to fall, at last, into a deep sleep.

A Meaning in context:

1) Choose the best explanation for each expression.

a) "it was not his imagination" (l 11) means

- A. It was something he had dreamt.
- B. It was something he believed.
- C. It was something that was real.

b) "all he could make out" (l 14) means

- A. all that he was able to think.
- B. All that he was able to distinguish.
- C. All that he was able to form in his mind.

c) "He was throttled by fear" (l 15) means

- A. He was being strangled.
- B. He was dying from fright.
- C. He was extremely frightened.

2) Give a synonym for each word according to the context.

a) sleepily (l 5)

b) enormous (l 24)

c) comical (l 32)

d) astonishing (l 40)

e) speed (l 40)

Answer these questions:

1) Why couldn't Alain go to sleep that night?

2) Why do you think he thought of ghosts when he could not see any intruder in his room?

- 3) Why was he angry instead of frightened when he saw the rat?
- 4) Do you think the rat was afraid of Alain? Why?