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CHAPTER SIX

When Moore arrived home, Mrs Dempster had already left. But his supper was ready for him. The lamp was burning brightly and there was a good fire in the fireplace. It was a cold, windy evening, but the room was warm and inviting. For a few minutes after he came in, the rats were quiet. But, as before, they soon became used to his presence in the room. Soon they started their noise again.

He was glad to hear them. He remembered how silent they had been when the great rat appeared. Moore soon forgot the squeaking and scratching. He sat down to his dinner with a light heart. After dinner he opened his books, determined to get some work done.

For an hour or two he worked very well. Then his concentration weakened, and he looked up. It was a stormy night. The whole house seemed to shake, and the wind whistled down the chimneys with a strange, unnatural sound. The force of the wind shook the alarm bell. The pliable rope rose and fell a little, and the bottom of it hit the oak floor with a hard and hollow sound.

As Moore watched it, he remembered the doctor's words: 'It's the hangman's rope.' He went over to the corner by the fireplace and took the rope in his hand. He looked at it very hard. He wondered how many people had died on the end of that rope. As he held it, the movement of the bell on the roof still lifted it now and again. Then he felt a new movement. The rope seemed to tremble, as if something was moving along it. At the same time, the noise of the rats stopped.

Moore looked up, and saw the great rat coming down towards him. It was staring at him with hate. Moore dropped the rope and jumped back with a cry. The rat turned, ran up the rope again and disappeared. At the same moment Moore realized that the noise of the other rats had begun again.

'Very well, my friend,' thought Moore, 'let's investigate your hiding place.'

He lit the other lamp. He remembered that the rat had disappeared inside the third picture on the right. He picked up the lamp and carried it across to the picture.

He almost dropped the lamp. He stepped back at once, and the sweat of fear was upon his pale face. His knees shook. His whole body trembled like a leaf. But he was young and brave, and he moved forward again with his lamp. Mrs Dempster had dusted and washed the picture, and Moore could now see it quite clearly.

It showed a judge. He had a cruel, clever, merciless face, with a big curved nose and very bright, hard eyes. As Moore looked into those eyes, he realized that he had seen that look before. The great rat's eyes were exactly the same. They held the same look of hate and cruelty. Then the noise of the rats stopped again, and Moore became conscious of another pair of eyes looking at him. The great rat was staring at him from the hole in the corner of the picture. But Moore took no notice of the creature and continued to examine the picture.

The Judge was sitting in a great, high-backed oak chair, on the right-hand side of a great stone fireplace. In the corner a rope hung down from the ceiling. With a feeling of horror, Moore recognized the room where he now stood. He looked around him, as if he expected to see another presence there. Then he looked across to the corner of the fireplace. He froze with fear and the lamp fell from his trembling hand.

There, in the Judge's chair, sat the rat. The rope hung behind, exactly as it did in the picture. The rat looked at Moore with the same merciless stare as the Judge in the picture. But there was a new, triumphant look in the small red eyes. Everything was silent except for the storm outside.

'The lamp!' thought Moore desperately, fortunately it was a metal one, and the oil had not caught fire. However, he had to put it out. In doing so, he forgot his fears for a moment.

Then he stopped and thought, 'I can't go on like this, he said to himself. 'The doctor is right. Late hours and strong tea are no good for me. They just make me nervous. However, I'm all right now.' He made himself a warm, milky drink and sat down to work.

Nearly an hour later a sudden silence disturbed him again. Outside, the storm was growling and whistling as loudly as ever. The rain drummed on the windows. But inside the house everything was as quiet as the grave. Moore- listened carefully, and then he heard a strange squeaking noise. It came from the corner of the room where the rope hung down. At first he thought the rope itself was making the sound. Then he looked up and saw the great rat. It was chewing the rope with its ugly yellow teeth. It had almost bitten through it, and, as Moore watched, part of the rope fell to the floor. Only a short piece was still attached to the

bell, and the rat was still hanging onto it. Now the rope began to swing backwards and forwards. Moore felt a moment of terrible fear. 'Now I can never ring the alarm bell,' he thought. Then he was filled with anger. He picked up the book he was reading, and threw it violently at the rat. He aimed it well. But before the book could hit the creature, it dropped off the rope and landed on the floor. At once Moore rushed towards it, but the rat ran away and disappeared into the shadows.

'Let's have another rat hunt before bed!' said Moore to himself. He picked up the lamp - and almost dropped it again.

The figure of the Judge had disappeared from the picture. The chair and the details of the room were still there. But the man himself had gone. Frozen with horror, Moore moved slowly round. He began to shake and tremble. His strength left him, and he was unable to move a muscle. He could only see and hear.

There, on the great high-backed oak chair sat the Judge. His merciless eyes stared at Moore. There was a smile of triumph on his cruel mouth. Slowly he lifted up a black hat. Moore's heart was drumming wildly. There was a strange singing noise in his ears. Outside, the wind was as wild as ever. Then, above the screams of the wind, he heard the great clock striking in the market place. He stood and listened, stiff and unmoving. The triumph on the Judge's face grew. As the clock struck twelve, the Judge placed the Black hat on his head. Slowly and deliberately, he rose from his chair and picked up the piece of rope from the floor. He pulled it through his hands. Slowly and carefully he made the thick, pliable rope into a noose. He tested the noose with his foot. He pulled hard at it until he was pleased with it. Then he began to move slowly and carefully past the table, on the opposite side to Moore. Then with one quick movement he stood in front of the door. Moore was trapped! All this time, the Judge's eyes never left Moore's.

Write the number in front of the word that means the same.

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. arrived | _____ bendable |
| 2. concentration | _____ victory |
| 3. supper | _____ notice |
| 4. tremble | _____ came |
| 5. triumph | _____ quiet |
| 6. silent | _____ attention |
| 7. pliable | _____ dinner |
| 8. conscious | _____ happy |
| 9. pleased | _____ shake |

Mark the statements true or false.

When Moore came home, the rats were squeaking loudly.

True ☐ False ☐

Moore prepared his own supper.

True ☐ False ☐

Moore liked the sound of the rats.

True ☐ False ☐

The cold, windy evening turned into an eerie stormy night.

True ☐ False ☐

There was a pliable rope hanging from the alarm bell.

True ☐ False ☐

The judge thought of a story he heard in the news about hangings.

True ☐ False ☐

The judge saw the great rat running down the rope.

True ☐ False ☐

The rat stared at him with tenderness.

True ☐ False ☐

The other rats went wild, squeaking madly, when the great rat appeared.

True ☐ False ☐

Moore saw a picture of the judge and thought he looked like the doctor.

True ☐ False ☐

The cruel merciless face of the judge looked like the face of the great rat.

True ☐ False ☐

The judge in the picture was in the same room Moore was standing.

True ☐ False ☐

The great rat gnawed the rope, so Moore could no longer ring the bell.

True ☐ False ☐

Moore got angry and threw a book at the rat.

True ☐ False ☐

Why did Moore suddenly become so afraid? In your words write a paragraph what made him scared and what you think is going to happen.

