



Marcel and the Shakespeare Letters

Stephen Rabley



Summary

Pages 1–7: Each November Marcel comes to London to visit his friend Henry who lives near Knightsbridge station. Henry tells Marcel about his new neighbour, Professor Barton, who found some letters by Shakespeare in Oxford, and is going to give them to the British Museum. The professor is at the cinema that evening, and the friends decide to go to the professor's flat to see the letters. They get to the flat and find the safe is empty – the letters are not there. There is a big hole at the back of the safe. Marcel and Henry get through the hole to another room and see a woman there. They see the Shakespeare letters in her bag. The woman takes the bag and leaves.

Pages 8–15: Henry says that people who live in this flat are on holiday, and he doesn't know this woman. In the flat they find a note with her flight details and go to the airport. Luckily there is a direct line from Knightsbridge to Heathrow airport. At the airport they find the woman. Marcel gets into her bag and finds Shakespeare letters there. As he is getting out of the bag, the woman notices him and starts shouting. The woman fails to catch the mice. They return to the professor's flat. When the professor comes back home, Marcel and Henry hide behind the chair. The professor is very much surprised to see the letters on the table. The next morning, Professor Barton gives the letters to the British Museum. Everyone thanks him, and Henry thanks Marcel.

Background and themes

Guy Fawkes Day: The story happens on the 5 November, 'Guy Fawkes Day' also called 'Bonfire Night', when people in Britain light fireworks and burn a 'guy' on a fire. It marks the day when a group of Catholics wanted to blow

up the English Parliament and King James I in 1605. Guy Fawkes was a group leader who was put to death.

Fireworks in the street helped the criminal to blow up the safe, as the noise was not noticed by the neighbours.

Two worlds: The mice share the world of humans and behave like human beings. They are clever and brave, and help people, who are unaware of it. They manage to return the valuables stolen by a thief, which proves that you don't always have to be big and mighty to win.

National heritage: Items with cultural and historical value are important for the whole nation, and should be taken proper care of, so all people can have access to them. The best place to keep them is a museum.

International friendship: Marcel, a French mouse, helps his British friend to return the Shakespeare letters because he understands how important they are for the British people. And he does it without thinking of any reward, just because he wants to help.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- 1 **Discuss:** Get students to look at the title and ask them: *Who is William Shakespeare? Why is he famous? When did he live? Do you know any works by Shakespeare? Are his letters important? Why/Why not?*

While reading

- 2 **Pair work and role play:** Ask students to prepare a conversation between Marcel and Henry while they are having their tea (p. 3). They should use their imagination and try to include details which are not in the story.
- 3 **Write:** In pairs, have students to write the following letter.
You are the American woman. Write a letter to your boss to explain how you lost the Shakespeare letters.

After reading

- 4 **Write:** In groups, have students think about and write the title for the article in the mouse newspaper about this story. Students read out their titles and choose the best one.
The newspaper 'The Mouse Daily Express' wants to run an article about the Shakespeare letters story. Think about the title for this article and write it down.
- 5 **Research and artwork:** Ask students to find more information about Guy Fawkes Day and make a poster.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.