

ACT TWO

(Overture)

Scene Nineteen: Sheriff's Office.

(CLOWN 2 has his feet up on the table and is laughing loudly. He is the SHERIFF OF THE COUNTY. Another man has his back to us.)

SHERIFF. Cigarette cases. Pocket watches. Spectacle holders. Ha ha ha! But never a hymn book Mr. Hannay!

(The other man turns. We see it is RICHARD HANNAY. Miraculously recovered. And laughing too.)

START — Who'd a'thought a hymn book could stop —

(Holds up a silver bullet. Throws it to him.)

— a bullet! Still, I'm not surprised. Some of those hymns are terrible hard to get through.

(They both laugh again.)

And to think I was drinking the villain's champagne only half an hour before!

HANNAY. Right!

SHERIFF. I canna barely believe it. Tea, Mr Hannay?

HANNAY. No thank you.

SHERIFF. Calling himself a professor! Whereas all along he was a —

HANNAY. A spy!

SHERIFF. A spy! Well it's a lesson to us all! Pretty slick sleuthing for an amateur Mr. Hannay!

HANNAY. Thank you.

SHERIFF. Sure about the tea?

HANNAY. Quite sure, thank you! Look here, sheriff, I don't want to rush you or anything but oughtn't we be taking steps? This is serious you know. If it weren't, you don't suppose I'd put myself in your hands with a murder charge hanging over me?

SHERIFF. Ach! Never heed the murder Mr. Hannay! I don't doubt you'll be able to convince Scotland Yard of your innocence as easily as you've convinced me. All I need is a short statement to forward to the proper authority. I've someone coming from the police station next door to take it down. Biscuit? **END**

HANNAY. No biscuit thank you!

SHERIFF. Nice Garibaldi?

HANNAY. Listen, sheriff, there's no time to be lost! He's got the information! And it's absolutely vital to the safety of –

(**CLOWN 1** *bursts through the door as the* **CHIEF INSPECTOR.**)

INSPECTOR. Are you wishing to see me, sheriff?

SHERIFF. Indeed I am, Chief Inspector! Do you think I enjoy playing for time with a **MURDERER!!!**

HANNAY. **MURDERER???**

CHIEF INSPECTOR. **MURDERER!!!**

SHERIFF. Richard Hannay, you are under arrest! On the charge of wilful murder of a woman unknown in Portland Mansions London on Tuesday last. Take him to the county gaol!

HANNAY. You heard my story! It's true! Every word of it!

SHERIFF. Listen, Hannay! We're not such imbeciles in Scotland as some smart Londoners may think! I don't believe your cock-and-bull story about the professor! Why he's my best friend in the district!

(*picks up phone*)

Get me Professor Jordan!

HANNAY. If the professor didn't shoot me – where did this bullet come from?

ACT ONE

Overture

(The actors run on and take a bow. Then frantically pull on the set for scene one.)

(Lights change.)

Scene One. Hannay's Apartment. London.

(In the centre of the stage is a large armchair, a standard lamp and a table. On the table a half empty bottle of scotch and empty glass.)

(Seated in the armchair is RICHARD HANNAY. About forty. Attractive. Pencil moustache. He addresses the audience.)

START

HANNAY. London. 1935. August. I'd been back three months in the old country and frankly wondering why. The weather made me liverish, no exercise to speak of and the talk of the ordinary Englishman made me sick. I'd had enough of restaurants and parties and race meetings. No pal to go about with – which probably explains things. Hoppy Byng lost in the Canadian Treasury, Tommy Deloraine married off to a blonde heiress in Chicago, Chips Carruthers eaten by crocodiles in the Limpopo. Leaving me. Richard Hannay. Thirty-seven years old, sound in wind and limb. Back home. Which was no home at all if you want to know. Just a dull little rented flat in West One. Portland Place actually. And I was bored. No more than bored. Tired. Tired of the world and tired of – life, to be honest. So I called my broker. He wasn't in. Dropped into my

club. Full of old colonial buffers. Had a scotch and soda, picked up an evening paper, put it back. Full of elections and wars and rumours of wars. And I thought – who the bloody hell cares frankly? What does it all matter? What happens to anyone? What happens to me? No-one'd miss me. I wouldn't miss me. I could quite easily just –

(He takes a slug of scotch. Knocks it back.)

And then I thought – wait a minute! Come on Hannay! Pull yourself together man!

Find something to do, you bloody fool! Something mindless and trivial. Something utterly pointless. Something –

(He has a brainwave.)

– I know! A West End show!¹ That should do the trick!

— END

(He marches out.)

(Music: Mr. Memory Theme)

(Footlights come up)

1. If performing outside London, you could try 'I know! A visit to the theatre!' Or 'A trip to London's popular West End!'

HANNAY. For lunch?

PROFESSOR. Very good, Mr. Hannay. You see you're just the kind of man we need. Sharp. Intelligent. Cold-blooded. Ruthless. When the war comes these will be the exact qualities we need.

HANNAY. War?

PROFESSOR. Oh yes! We'll have quite a show of it.

HANNAY. And what if I don't believe in those qualities?

PROFESSOR. What other qualities are there?

HANNAY. Well...human qualities.

PROFESSOR. *Human* qualities! What human qualities?

HANNAY. Loyalty, selflessness, sacrifice...

(pause)

...love...

START

PROFESSOR. *(He laughs a cruel laugh.)* Love!? Oh please Mr. Hannay! When have you ever *loved* anyone? It's not in your nature, old sport. Never has been, has it? You have no heart, do you Hannay! But you know this.

(HANNAY sits shocked. How does the professor know his deepest fears?)

So sad, isn't it? No one to love. No one to care for. No home to go to.

(The professor comes close to HANNAY, pinned in the armchair. Blows smoke into his face.)

But there is you see. There is – *our home!*

HANNAY. Our home?

PROFESSOR. That is the only place you will find 'love' old chum. Where you really and truly belong.

(We notice a German accent subtly emerging from the professor's cultured British tones. HANNAY stares in horror as the truth starts to dawn.)

Oh we will give you love, Hannay. And in return? You will love us!! The master race. On our great unstoppable march. Commanded eternally by destiny itself!! Well old sport? What do you say?? Will you join us? Hannay!??

(The PROFESSOR waits excitedly. HANNAY thinks. The clock ticks in the corner. HANNAY decides.)

HANNAY. Alright Professor. If you think I'm suitable material.

PROFESSOR. *(whoops delightedly)* Oh I do! I do, old sport. How unutterably splendid! I will tell Mrs. Jordan.

(He cackles with pleasure. Runs to the door.)

HANNAY. Oh. There's just one thing. Sorry.

PROFESSOR. Of course. Anything!

HANNAY. One little question.

PROFESSOR. Ask away!

HANNAY. Before I sign up.

PROFESSOR. Absolutely mein leibling.

HANNAY. What exactly is erm –

PROFESSOR. Yes yes yes?

HANNAY. – the Thirty-Nine Steps?

PROFESSOR. *The Thirty-Nine Steps!* The Thirty-Nine Steps – though I say it myself – is mein own brilliant idea! The very soul of the enterprise! The very –

(He gasps. Realises HANNAY's ruse.)

But wait a minute!! Wait a minute! You – you – think you can pull ze vool? Ach!! You thought you could join us and then –

HANNAY. Master race? *I despise you!!!*

(The PROFESSOR staggers back clutching his chest.)

PROFESSOR. Ach! You are as bad as she was! Anabella Schmidt! With all her outmoded sentimental notions. Her high-minded *DEMOKRATIKISCH BOVEN-SHEISSEDRIVVLE!* I thought for a moment you might – but no! No!! You – you – pathetic – pusilanimous – petty-minded –

END

(He fires directly at HANNAY's heart.)

(HANNAY staggers. Realises he's been shot.)