

Side 4 - Mrs. Jordan, Hannay, Professor

54

THE 39 STEPS

Scene Sixteen: Alt Na Shellach.

(A grey-haired lady in tweeds opens the door MRS LOUISA JORDAN. Played by CLOWN 1.)

MRS JORDAN. Yes?

HANNAY. I am so sorry to disturb you but I'm looking for the professor. Professor Jordan.

MRS JORDAN. Professor Jordan? I am the Professor's wife. Louisa Jordan.

HANNAY. I do beg your pardon Mrs Jordan. May I see the Professor? It's really quite important.

MRS JORDAN. May I know your name?

HANNAY. Yes. My name is Hammond. Tell him a friend of Miss Annabella Schmidt.

MRS JORDAN. Miss Annabella Schmidt? Come in Mr Hammond if you would please.

HANNAY. Thank you.

Scene Seventeen: Alt Na Shellach. Interior.

(She leads him through the baronial corridors. HANNAY looks about him.)

HANNAY. Lovely house.

MRS JORDAN. Well, we like it.

(They walk through several enormous rooms.)

MRS JORDAN. We're just having a few drinks with some friends to celebrate my daughter Hilary's birthday. A number of well-to-do acquaintances of my husband. Including the Sheriff of the County. Later we're organizing a shooting party. Perhaps you'd care to join us?

HANNAY. Thank you.

MRS JORDAN. Shall we pop into the party?

(She opens the door. Wild shadows dance across their faces.)

(Cocktail Party sound effects/jitterbug-type music)

(She has second thoughts. Closes the door.)

(Music stops.)

MRS JORDAN. On second thoughts. If you wouldn't mind waiting in here Mr. Hammond. I'll fetch my husband directly.

HANNAY. Certainly.

(She opens the door.)

(Music starts again.)

(Shadows dance. She closes the door behind her.)

(Music stops.)

Scene Eighteen: The Professor's Study.

(HANNAY waits. Looks around. Tentatively opens the door.)

(Music starts.)

(Shadows dance. He closes the door.)

(Music stops.)

(tries again)

(Music starts.)

(Shadows dance. He closes the door.)

(Music stops.)

(a last tiny look)

(Music starts.)

(Shadows dance. He closes the door.)

(Music stops.)

(a voice from behind him:)

VOICE. Mr. Hammond?

(HANNAY swings round. PROFESSOR JORDAN is seated in an armchair.)

PROFESSOR. So sorry to have kept you.

HANNAY. It's quite alright.

PROFESSOR. So you're from Annabella Schmidt?

HANNAY. I am yes.

PROFESSOR. Do you have any news?

HANNAY. She's been murdered!

PROFESSOR. *Murdered!?* Oh dear, yes, of course. The Portland Mansions affair. Quite dreadful. And now the police are after you.

HANNAY. They are rather!

PROFESSOR. Well don't worry about them. I managed to put them off the scent. They'll be far away by now.

HANNAY. Thanks awfully.

PROFESSOR. (*smiling kindly*) Not at all old chap.

HANNAY. I didn't do it!

PROFESSOR. Of course you didn't do it Mr. – Mr. Hannay.
I suppose it's safe to call you by your real name now?

HANNAY. Quite safe.

PROFESSOR. Jolly Good. But tell me – why did you come all the way to Scotland to tell me about it?

HANNAY. Because I believe she was trying to tell you about some secret top secret air ministry...secret and she was killed by a foreign agent who was interested too.

PROFESSOR. Really? Well I'm so glad you told me! And risking your life into the bargain! How can I ever thank you?

(*HANNAY smiles modestly. Then presses on urgently.*)

HANNAY. The thing is professor, she was looking for something!

PROFESSOR. Yes?

HANNAY. Something called –

PROFESSOR. Go on.

HANNAY. The Thirty-Nine Steps! If we can find out what the Thirty-Nine Steps are then –

(*The professor stands. Still smiling.*)

PROFESSOR. So – let me get this quite clear – oh I'm so sorry – you must be exhausted! Do take a seat Mr. Hannay.

(*He stands. Proffers him his own arm chair. HANNAY sits rather awkwardly.*)

HANNAY. Thank you.

PROFESSOR. So – did she tell you what this foreign agent looked like?

HANNAY. There wasn't time. Oh! There was one thing. Part of his little finger was missing.

PROFESSOR. Which little finger?

HANNAY. This one I think.

(holds up a little finger)

PROFESSOR. Are you sure it wasn't – this one?

(He holds up his own little finger. It is cut off at the knuckle.)

HANNAY. I'm not sure. I think –

(The professor pulls out a gun. HANNAY gasps!)

PROFESSOR. Mr. Hannay – I'm afraid I've been guilty of leading you down the garden path. Or should I say – up. I never can remember.

HANNAY. It seems to be the wrong garden alright.

PROFESSOR. Yes. I'm afraid it does. Mr. Hannay, you've forced me into a very difficult position. You see I live here as a respectable citizen. My very best friend is the Sheriff of the County. You must realise my whole existence could be jeopardised if it became known that I was not – how shall I say – not what I seem. You see there's my wife and daughter to think of. But what makes it doubly important that I simply can't let you go is that I'm just about to convey some very vital information out of the country. Oh yes, I've got it alright. I'm afraid poor Annabella would have been far too late. So it seems there is only one option, Mr Hannay. I'm going to have to shoot you. In self-defence of course.

(He cocks the gun, takes aim.)

Tomorrow morning's papers will hail me a hero.

(MRS JORDAN walks in.)

(Jitterbug music.)

(She takes in the gun. Doesn't flick an eyelid.)

MRS JORDAN. I shall be serving lunch directly, dear. The Sheriff has to go at three. Will Mr Hammond be staying?

PROFESSOR. I don't think so dear.

(MRS JORDAN smiles and leaves.)

(Music stops.)

PROFESSOR. Unless of course you decide to join us.

(Lights a cigarette in a black holder.)

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...

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.

(We notice a German accent subtly emerging from the professor's cultured British tones.)

HANNAY. Our home?

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

(HANNAY stares in horror as the truth starts to dawn. As the Professor's German accent becomes all too evident.)

PROFESSOR. *(cont.)* 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 heart.)

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 –

(He fires the gun.)

(HANNAY looks down. Realises he's been shot.)

HANNAY. Oh bugger.

(He sinks to the floor. The PROFESSOR watches. Cigarette smoke swirling about him.)

(HANNAY lies spread-eagled below him.)

PROFESSOR. The Thirty-Nine Steps? I tell you Mr Hannay.
YOU VILL NEVER EVER KNOW!

(The PROFESSOR flings open the door it. There is MRS JORDAN.)

(Jitterbug music. Very loud and raucous.)

(The PROFESSOR grasps MRS JORDAN's hand, pulls her into the room. They start dancing. They stamp and shout. They become wilder and wilder. The lights flicker and flash, turn red as a terrible conflagration envelops the stage. The flames lick around the stamping Jordans.)

(HANNAY's body lies motionless.)

End of Act One