

The 39 Steps

John Buchan



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by John Buchan

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CHAPTER 1: THE MAN WHO DIED

My name is Richard Hannay and I am thirty-seven years old.

I was born in Scotland, but in 1883 my family moved to Rhodesia. I grew up there and worked hard for twenty years. Then in March 1914 I returned to Britain. That was five months before the First World War began. I brought plenty of money with me and I wanted a good holiday. Indeed, Britain was the centre of all my dreams and plans, and I hoped to stay there for the rest of my life.

In May I was living in London in a flat which I had taken. One evening I was reading the newspaper there alone. There was some trouble in the East, and I also read a story about Karolides, the Greek Prime Minister.

'He's a good man,' I said to myself, 'and he's honest too. He may be the strongest Prime Minister in Europe, but the Germans hate him.'

Suddenly I heard a quiet knock on the door. I put down the newspaper and opened the door. A man was standing outside, and I recognized him at once. I did not know his name, but he had a flat on the top floor. He was a thin fellow with small bright blue eyes.

'I live on the top floor,' he said. 'Can I speak to you? May I come in?'

I invited him in and shut the door.

'I'm very sorry,' he said. 'But I'm in trouble. Will you help me?'

'Well, I'll listen to you,' I said. 'But I'd rather not promise more than that.'

I could see that he was nervous. He could not stand still, so I mixed a strong drink for him. He drank it at once. When he put down the glass, he broke it.

'Excuse me,' he said. 'I'm rather nervous tonight and there's a good reason for it. Now you seem honest, sir, and you look brave too. Well, I'm in great trouble and I need a friend.'

'Tell me about it,' I said, 'and then I'll give you my answer.'

'I'm an American,' he said. 'A few years ago I came to Europe to work for an American newspaper. I learned several languages and discovered quite a lot about European politics. I also found out the German plans for war and I know a group of German spies. Well, these spies are hunting me now, and that's the trouble. If you know anything about politics, sir, you'll know this. Europe is very near to war, and there's only one man who can stop it.'

'Who is he?' I asked.

'Karolides, the Greek Prime Minister.'

'Oh, I've just been reading about him,' I said. 'There's a story in the evening paper.'

'Yes. Well, the Germans want to kill him,' he said. 'They would kill me too if they could. Karolides will be coming to London next month. He has been invited to the Foreign Office on June 15th, and they've chosen that date to kill him. I'm the only man who can save him.'

'And how can I help you, Mr. -?'

'Scudder,' he said. 'Franklin P. Scudder. I've just told you, sir, that these spies want to kill me. I thought that I was quite safe in London. I was sure that my enemies hadn't followed me here. But yesterday evening I found a card in my letter-box, and there was a man's name on it. It was the name of my worst enemy.'

'You ought to tell the Foreign Office,' I said. 'They'll help you and they may save Karolides too.'

'There's no time for that. My enemies know that I'm in this building. They may be waiting outside to catch me. Do you think that I can hide in your flat, sir?'

'Well, I'd better prove your story first,' I said. 'I'll go outside and look around. If I see anything suspicious, I'll agree to help you. Is that all right?'

I left the flat and went out into the street. A man was standing outside the building. He raised his hand as soon as he saw me. I looked around quickly and noticed a face at a window-across the street. The man's signal was answered immediately, and the face disappeared. I bought another newspaper at the corner of the street and then went back to the flat.

'All right, Mr. Scudder,' I said. 'You can stay here tonight. I've proved your story. There's a fellow outside who looks rather suspicious. Your enemies may be staying in the house across the street. I saw a face at the window but it soon disappeared.'

Scudder stayed quietly in my flat for several days. When I went out, he was very nervous. I noticed that someone was always standing outside the building. I saw the face at the window a few times, but no one came to the flat.

Scudder wrote a lot of short notes in a little black book. He counted the days to June 15th and marked them off in the book.

One day he said, 'The time is going quickly, Hannay. If they're still watching the house, I won't be able to escape. If anything happens to me, will you continue the fight?'

I liked Scudder's adventures, and his story was exciting. But I had no interest in politics, and I did not listen to him carefully. He continued to talk.

He told me about a woman named Julia Czechenyi who was one of the spies. 'She's a terrible enemy, Hannay,' he said, 'but the old man is worse.'

This old man was Scudder's chief enemy, and he described him very carefully. 'It's strange,' he said, 'but he has the voice of a young man. And his eyes, Hannay! If you see his eyes, you'll never forget them. They're small and bright, like a bird's eyes.'

He talked for a long time that day. I cannot remember everything that he said. But I noticed that he was more nervous than usual.

In the evening I went out to dinner with a friend. It was half-past ten when I returned. I opened the door of the flat and went in. The lights were not lit and this seemed rather strange. I put them on and looked around. There was nobody there and I thought that Scudder had gone to bed early.

I walked into the next room and saw something in the corner. For a moment I did not recognize it, but then I suddenly felt very cold and weak. I wanted to open my mouth and cry out. But I could not move or say anything.

Scudder was lying on his back in the corner. There was a long knife through his heart. Its handle stood up above his clothes, and the poor man was fixed to the floor.

CHAPTER 2: THE MILKMAN

At last I sat down feeling very sick. I sat there for perhaps five minutes and then I felt afraid. I was so nervous that I had to cover Scudder's body with a tablecloth. But I could still see the form of the handle of the knife. It was pointing at me like a finger. I got a drink for myself and sat down again to think.

Scudder was dead and his body proved his story. His enemies had killed him because he knew their plans.

'They'll kill me next,' I thought. 'They know that he lived on the top floor. They know

that he has been in my flat for three or four days. And they'll guess that he told me their plans.'

What could I do? Well, I could go to the police at once and tell them the story. But they would be suspicious if I told them about Scudder's death. 'They'll guess that I killed him,' I thought. 'They may blame me for his death.'

I thought about the matter for a long time and then I made a plan. I had not known Scudder very well but I had liked him. I enjoyed an adventure too, and I wanted to continue his work.

'I may write to the Prime, Minister,' I thought, 'or to the Foreign Office. But perhaps that won't be necessary. I'll disappear for a few weeks. Then I'll come back to London and go to the police.'

I went over to Scudder's body and took off the cloth. I had seen him writing in a little book and I searched his pockets. But the book was gone, and he had no papers at all. I opened my desk and took out a map of Britain. I thought that Scotland was the best place for my plan. I was born there and I still speak like a Scotsman. In Rhodesia I had learned German very well too, and I thought about going to Germany. But perhaps Scotland was the better idea.

I chose Galloway, which was a wild part of the country. There were few big towns there, and it was not too far to travel. I knew that there was a train to Scotland in the morning. It left London at ten minutes past seven. But how could I get out of the flat? I should not be able to escape if Scudder's enemies were outside the building.

Then suddenly I had a wonderful idea. Every morning at half-past six the milkman delivered my milk. He was a young man and we were the same size. He had a short black moustache and wore a white hat and coat. My idea was to borrow his clothes and the can of milk. Then I could escape from the building as the milkman.

I went to bed then and slept for a few hours. In the morning I had a bath and carefully cut my moustache. It was long and dark and I cut it short. I counted my money and put fifty pounds in my pocket. While I was getting ready, I remembered my tobacco. When I put my fingers into the large tobacco-box, I felt something hard under the tobacco. It was Scudder's little black book, and I put it in my pocket.

It was a good sign, I thought. Scudder had hidden it there, and his enemies had not found it.

It was twenty minutes to seven now, and the milkman was late. But suddenly I heard the noise of the milk-can on the stairs, and I opened the door.

'Come in, please,' I said. 'I want to speak to you.'

He came into the flat, and I shut the door.

'Listen,' I said, 'you're a good fellow, and I want you to help me.' I took a sovereign out of my pocket and added, 'If you agree, I'll give you this.'

'When he saw the sovereign, his eyes opened wide.'

'What do you want me to do?' he asked.

'I want to borrow your clothes and your milk-can for a few minutes,' I said.

He laughed and said, 'What do you want them for?'

'Well, I've just remembered something, but I can't explain it now. Let me borrow the things, and I'll be back in ten minutes.' I put the sovereign into his hand.

'All right,' he said. 'I like a bit of fun too.'

I put on his clothes and we went out of the flat. I shut the door behind me.

'Don't follow me,' I said. 'I'll soon be back.'

I went down the stairs and into the street. I made a noise with the milk-can and began to sing. A man who was standing outside looked at me, but he did not say anything. I looked at the house across the street and noticed the face at the window again. I turned into another street and began to run. Then I took off the milkman's clothes and threw them, and the milk-can, over a wall.

When I arrived at the railway station, it was ten minutes past seven. The train was moving slowly out of the station, and I had no time to buy a ticket. I ran forward and caught the handle of a door. I got it open and climbed into the train.

The ticket-collector soon came along. He was rather angry with me, and I had to invent some excuses. But he accepted these and wrote a ticket to Newton-Stewart in Galloway.

CHAPTER 3: THE LITERARY INN-KEEPER

All that day I travelled to the north. The train stopped at Leeds station where I bought a basket of food and the morning newspapers. Another ticket-collector came in and told me that I had to change trains at Dumfries.

I read the papers, but of course there was nothing in them about Scudder's death. It was too early for that. Then I took out Scudder's little book. It was full of figures but there were also a few strange names. I noticed the words 'Hofgaard', 'Luneville', 'Avocado' and 'Pavia'. 'Pavia' appeared several times.

It was clearly some kind of code and I have always been interested in codes. I looked carefully at this one. Scudder had written numbers instead of letters. But what did the names mean? I knew that some of them were towns. But had he used them instead of People's names? There is usually a key-word in codes like this, and I tried to guess it. 'Hofgaard' was clearly not the key-word because it did not suit the rest of the code. I tried the other words too but none suited the code.

I slept for an hour or two, and then the ticket-collector's voice woke me up.

'Be quick, sir. I mean that you have to change here.' I looked out of the window. We were at Dumfries, and the train had stopped. I got out and crossed the station to the Galloway train.

The train was quite full, and I had an interesting conversation with a farmer. He thought that I was a farmer too! We talked about cattle and crops and prices. Many people got out at different stations, but I continued. At five o'clock the train stopped at a small place which suited me very well. I cannot remember its name, but it was quiet. And it was a long way from London.

I got out and a child took my ticket. It was such a fine evening that I felt quite happy. I followed the road for a mile perhaps and then took a path along a valley. It was not long before I reached a cottage. There was a woman at the door of the cottage and I spoke to her. She answered me very politely, and I said, 'May I stay here tonight?' 'You're welcome,' she replied. 'Please come in.'

Very soon she laid a fine meal in front of me, and I drank several glasses of thick sweet milk.

When it grew dark, her husband came home. He was a big man with a thick black moustache. We talked politely for an hour or more, and smoked some of my tobacco. They did not ask me any questions but guessed perhaps that I was a farmer.

In the morning I enjoyed a large breakfast. But when I offered half a sovereign to the woman, she would not take it. It was a warm day, so she gave me a small can of milk to take with me. It was nine o'clock when I left the cottage.

I walked a few miles to the south because I wanted to return to the railway. But of course I could not go back to the same little station. The railway men and the child would recognize me if they saw me again. And then they would remember me.

So I went towards the next station and on my way there made a plan. The safest way was to return to Dumfries. The police might be searching for me, and I should be safer in a big town.

When I reached the station, I bought a ticket to Dumfries. I did not have long to wait until a train came in. I got in with an old man and his dog, and the man soon went to sleep. I borrowed his morning paper which lay beside him.

The story of the murder was on the first page. Big letters said 'MURDER IN A LONDON FLAT'.

The milkman had waited for me for half an hour. Then he had called the police. They had got into my flat and found Scudder's body. The milkman had been arrested and taken to prison! I felt very sorry for the poor man.

The story was continued on the back page. And the latest news was that the milkman had been released. The police were now looking for a man named Richard Hannay! They thought that he had escaped by train and gone to Scotland.

I was glad that the milkman had been released. He knew nothing about the murder, and I had only given him a sovereign. He had been arrested and sent to prison for that!

The train stopped at a station which I recognized. It was the place where I had got out the night before. Another train had just arrived from Dumfries, and three men had got out of it. They were talking to the railway men and the child. I watched them carefully. The child was pointing along the road which I had taken.

The train started again. While it was moving out of the station, I covered my face with

the newspaper. It had gone a mile perhaps when it suddenly stopped again. We were not at a station. The train was near a bridge over a river.

This was my chance, and I changed my plan at once. I opened the door and jumped out. It would have been a good idea if I had not forgotten the dog. When I jumped, the dog tried to follow me. The old man woke up and rushed to the door.

'Help! help!' he cried.

I ran down to the river bank and hid among some bushes there. The ticket-collector and several people had come along and were standing at the open door. A man was pointing towards the river bank.

But a lucky chance saved me. I had not noticed that the dog was tied to the man. Suddenly the dog jumped out and pulled the old man out too. They rolled down the bank, and everybody forgot me for a moment. The old man was rescued, but in the excitement the dog bit somebody. I took my chance and ran away through the bushes.

When I looked back, the excitement was over. The people were climbing into the train again, and soon it began to move.

I walked along the river bank and thought about my problem. I was safe but I was also afraid. I do not mean that I was afraid of the police. I was thinking about Scudder's enemies and their plans which I knew. I felt sure that they would try to kill me or have me sent to prison. They were a danger to me, and I could not hide my fear. My troubles were not over yet.

I climbed away from the river until I reached the top of a hill. There were other hills around me, and I could see clearly for several miles. There were the railway station and one or two cottages. Dust was rising over towards the east and that meant a road. Then I looked up into the blue sky, and my heart almost stopped beating. A small plane was flying towards me. And I knew at once that Scudder's enemies were in that plane. The British police never used aircraft to look for people.

I rolled behind a rock and watched the machine. It flew along the river bank in narrow circles. It was so low that I could see the pilot. But I was sure that he did not see me. Then it climbed and turned. It flew over the river again and went back to the south.

I decided at once to leave those hills. There was no place for me to hide. And my enemies would soon find me if they could look down on me from the sky.

At six o'clock I reached the road. I followed it for a few miles. It was beginning to get dark when I came to a house beside a bridge. I was surprised to see one house standing alone in that wild country.

A young man was standing on the bridge reading.

'Good evening,' he said. 'It's a fine evening, isn't it?'

'Yes, indeed,' I replied. 'Is this house an inn?'

'Yes, sir, and I'm the inn-keeper. Would you like to stay here tonight?'

'You're a very young inn-keeper, aren't you?'

'Well, my father died last year and left me this inn. I'm living here with my mother but I don't like the work at all. I'd rather write stories, but what can I write about? I don't meet many interesting people.'

I suddenly got the idea that this young man could help me. 'I'll tell you a story,' I said, 'and it's true too. I need a friend. And I'll tell you this story in order to get your help. I'll give you permission to write it, but don't do anything before June 15th.'

That's a very important date.'

Then I sat on the bridge and told him a story. He listened carefully, and his eyes were bright with excitement.

'I'm a farmer from Rhodesia,' I said, 'and I came to Britain a few weeks ago. I travelled by ship from German West Africa. The Germans there thought that I was a spy. And they followed me all the way to Britain. They've already killed my best friend, and now they're trying to kill me. Have you read the newspaper today?'

He nodded.

'Well then, you know about the murder of Franklin Scudder.'

'He was my best friend, and he was killed in my own flat.'

I told him that Scudder had worked for the Foreign Office. And I explained that he had known some of the Germans' secrets. It was quite a long story, and I made it very exciting.

At the end I said, 'You're looking for adventure, aren't you? Well, you've found it now. These German spies may come here, and I want to hide from them.'

He took my arm politely and pulled me towards the inn. 'You'll be safe here, sir,' he said. 'You must tell me your adventures again, and I'll write them down.'

'All right. But I have some work to do first. Scudder gave me a long message in code. And I must find out what it means.'

While we were going into the inn, I heard the plane again. It was flying low towards the bridge.

I had a quiet room at the back of the house. The inn-keeper's mother brought me my meals. The place suited me very well.

The next morning I took out Scudder's note-book and began to work. The code was a difficult one, and I had to try many possible key-words. By noon I had found the spaces between the words but I could not discover the letters.

After dinner I tried again and worked hard until three o'clock. Then suddenly I had an idea. I was lying back in my chair when a woman's name came into my head. It was Julia Czechenyi. Scudder had told me that she was one of his worst enemies. Perhaps her name was the key-word. I tried it quickly on the code and it was right!

'Julia' has five letters, and Scudder had used these letters instead of *a*, *e*, *i*, *o* and *u*. *J* is the tenth letter in English, and so he used the number 10 instead of a. The letter *e* was the *u* of 'Julia', and *u* is the twenty-first letter. So Scudder had written 21 instead of *e*.

The name 'Czechenyi' gave me nine other numbers, and I could soon read Scudder's notes. I sat in my room working quietly for the rest of the afternoon.

The facts in Scudder's little book were terrible. Indeed, when the woman brought my tea, I was a very nervous man. My face looked pale, and I did not want to eat anything.

'Are you all right, sir?' she asked. 'You look very pale.'

'Oh, it's nothing,' I said. 'Please put the things on the table.'

There was a sudden noise outside the inn, and the woman left my room. I heard a motor-car stopping and then there were several voices.

A few minutes later the inn-keeper rushed into my room. 'Two men have just arrived,' he said, 'and they're looking for you. They described you very well.'

'What did you tell them?'

'I told them that you had stayed here last night but had left early this morning.'

'Can you describe them?'

'One is a thin fellow with dark eyes, and the other is rather fat.'

'Do they talk like Englishmen?'

He nodded. 'Oh, yes, I think so.'

I picked up a bit of paper and wrote quickly in German:

'... Black Stone. Scudder had heard about this., but, he could not do anything until June 15th. Karolides' plans are uncertain, and I may not be able to help. But if Mr. T. advises, I will try . . .'

When I had written the message, I tore the edges of the paper. It was like a part of a torn-up letter.

'Give this to them,' I said. 'Tell them that it was found in my room.'

Three minutes later the men drove away in the car. The inn-keeper appeared in great excitement.

'Your paper gave them a surprise,' he said. 'The dark fellow turned pale, and the fat one looked very ugly. They paid for their drinks and left at once.'

'Now I want you to do something for me,' I said. 'Get on your bicycle and go to the police at Newton-Stewart. Describe the two men and talk about the London murder. You can invent reasons. You can say that you heard a conversation between them.'

One man told the other that he had just been released from prison.. And say that you also heard Scudder's name. The hunt isn't over yet. Those two fellows will come back tomorrow morning, and the police must be here to arrest them.'

He went off at once, and I continued my work on Scudder's notes. It was six o'clock when he came back.

'It's all right,' he said. 'The police will be here at eight o'clock in the morning.'

We had a meal together, and I had to tell him my adventures again. He made notes about them during the meal. I could not sleep that night. I finished Scudder's book and then sat up in my chair until morning. I was thinking about Scudder's terrible story.

At eight o'clock three policemen arrived at the inn. The inn-keeper met them and showed them the garage. They left their car there and then came into the inn. Twenty minutes later another car appeared and stopped two hundred yards from the inn. I was watching from a window above the front-door. The car was driven under some trees and left there. Two men got out of it and walked towards the inn. The plan which I had made was not a very good one. I hoped that the police would arrest the men. If they did so, I should be quite safe.

But now I had a better idea. I wrote a note to the inn-keeper and left it in my room. Then I opened my window and dropped quietly into some bushes in the garden. I ran across the garden and along the edge of a field. A few minutes later I reached the trees.

I did not waste a moment. The car was standing there, and I got into it. I started the engine and drove away.

The wind carried the sound of angry voices to my ears. But soon I was travelling along that road at fifty miles an hour.

CHAPTER 4: SIR HARRY, THE YOUNG POLITICIAN

It was a beautiful morning. But I was not thinking about the fine weather or the views around me. My thoughts were all of Scudder and his notes.

The little man had lied to me. He had talked a lot about Karolides, and part of it was true. But he had not told me the important things. I did not blame Scudder for not telling me the real secrets. Perhaps he had been afraid to tell anyone. Of course Karolides was in danger, but the danger to all Europe was greater! That was the real secret which Scudder had kept in his little book.

The words 'Thirty-nine steps' appeared several times among his notes. And once he had written this: 'Thirty-nine steps. I counted them carefully. High tide there is at seventeen minutes past ten.'

I wondered what it meant. The 'thirty-nine steps' must be at some place on the coast. The word 'tide' proved that, but why was it important?

Scudder had written that war was certain and no one could stop it. The German plans had been ready since February 1912. They would kill Karolides on June 14th, and his death would be their excuse. 'The Germans will talk about peace in Europe,' he wrote, 'but they don't want peace. They're ready for war and they're going to attack us suddenly.'

Scudder had also written about the visit of a French officer to London. He was the chief of the French army and was coming on June 15th. 'This officer will be told the British plans and will then return to France.'

Then Scudder had added that the Black Stone would also be in London on that day. They would learn the plans too and would send them immediately to Germany.

I drove on through the pretty villages of Galloway. It was a beautiful part of Scotland. But I could not enjoy the peace that was all around me.

I had to escape from my enemies and stay alive. I had to wait for a chance to help Scudder. But it was going to be very difficult. The police and the 'Black Stone' were hunting me, and I had no friends in Scotland.

About noon I came to a large village. I was so hungry that I decided to stop. Then I noticed a policeman. He was standing outside the Post Office, reading a telegram. When he saw my car, he raised his hand and ran to the middle of the road.

'Stop! stop!' he shouted.

I was suddenly suspicious and knew that the telegram was about me. Something had happened at the inn, and perhaps the police had agreed with the spies. They had described me and the car, and the police had sent telegrams to all the villages.

I did not stop. The policeman put out his hand and ran beside the car. He caught my

arm through the window, which was open. And I hit him so hard that he fell back. I drove into the country again, following a narrow road. I climbed several hills above a wide valley. I was tired and hungry and began to look for a quiet inn where I could rest. But suddenly there was a noise above me and I looked up. The plane was a few miles away, flying towards me.

I drove fast down a hill between trees and high bushes. A car drove out from a narrow road at the side, and I could not stop. I pulled the wheel hard to the right and shut my eyes.

My car ran through the bushes and started to fall. I saw the bottom of the valley fifty feet below. I sprang out of the car and rolled into a bush. There was a terrible noise as the car turned over several times. Then it lay like a pile of old metal at the bottom of the valley.

Someone took my hand and pulled me out of the bush. A kind voice said, 'Are you hurt?'

A tall young man was standing beside me.

'I'm very sorry about this,' he said. 'I saw your car, but neither of us could stop in time. I hope that you're all right. But you look quite pale.'

I was rather glad about the accident. The police were looking for that car, so I could not travel far in it.

'It's my fault,,sir,' I said. 'I oughtn't to drive fast on these narrow roads. Well, that car will never be driven again. This is the end of my Scottish holiday, but I ought to be glad. It was almost the end of my life.'

'I'm very sorry indeed,' he said again. He looked at his watch and continued. 'There'll be time to go to my house. You can change your clothes and have something to eat there. Where's your case? Is it below in the car?'

'No. All my things are at an inn forty miles away.' I was wondering what to tell him about myself. I did not want to say that I was a Rhodesian. My name had been in the newspapers. The police knew that I had come from Rhodesia. Perhaps this man would guess the truth if I said anything about Rhodesia. So I decided to be an Australian. I had read a lot about Australia. I should be able to talk about that country if he asked me any questions. And he would never discover the truth.

'I'm an Australian,' I continued, 'and I never carry a lot of clothes about with me.'

'An Australian,' he cried. 'Well, I'm the luckiest man in Scotland! You agree with Free Trade of course.'

'I do,' I answered quickly. But I was not quite sure what he meant.

'That's fine. Free Trade is the best thing for Britain. Well now, you'll be able to help me this evening.' He took my arm and pulled me towards his car.

Three minutes later we reached the house. He took out three or four of his suits and laid them on the bed. I also borrowed one of his shirts. I chose a dark blue suit and put it on. Then he took me to the kitchen.

There was part of a meal on the table. 'If we don't hurry, we'll be late,' he said. 'Eat something now and take some food in your pocket. When we get back tonight, we'll have a good meal. We have to be in Brattleburn by seven o'clock.'

I had a cup of coffee and some cold meat. The young man stood by the fire and talked.

'You've come just at the right time, Mr.-. Oh, excuse me. You haven't told me your name.'

'Twisdon,' I said.

'Ah, Twisdon. Well, I'm in trouble, Mr. Twisdon, and I'd like you to help me. There's a public meeting tonight at Brattleburn, and I have to make a speech about politics. I'm

the Liberal Candidate for this part of Galloway, and Brattleburn is my chief town. Well, I'd got everything ready for the meeting, and Crumpleton, the old Liberal Prime Minister, was going to make the chief speech. But I had a telegram from him this afternoon saying that he's ill and can't come. That means that I must make the speech myself.'

'Well, you're the candidate,' I said. 'You ought to be able to make a speech.'

'Oh, I can make a short speech all right, but ten minutes is quite long enough for me. Now be a good fellow, Twisdon, and help me. You can tell the meeting all about Free Trade and Australia.'

I did not know anything about Free Trade, but I needed someone to help me too. Perhaps this was a chance.

'All right,' I said. 'I'm not a very good speaker but I'll talk to your friends about Australia.'

We left the house then and drove towards Brattleburn. On the way the young man told me a few things about himself, and one of these facts was very interesting. His father and mother were dead. He usually lived with his uncle who was the Chief Secretary at the Foreign Office.

This was exciting news because the Chief Secretary was an important man. And I wanted to meet him. I hoped that this young man could do something for me.

We drove through a little town where two police officers stopped the car. They shone their lamps on our faces, and I felt very nervous. I was afraid that they were going to arrest me.

'I'm sorry, Sir Harry,' one of the officers said. 'We're looking for a stolen car and thought that this was it.'

'Oh, that's all right.' Sir Harry laughed. 'My car is too old for anyone to steal,' he said, and we drove on.

It was five minutes to seven when we reached Brattleburn. Sir Harry stopped the car outside the town hall, and we went in. There were about five hundred people in the hall.

A gentleman stood up and made a short speech. He explained that Mr. Crumpleton was ill and could not come. 'But we're very lucky in Brattleburn this evening,' he continued. 'A famous public speaker from Australia is here. But first we shall listen to the Liberal Candidate for Brattleburn.'

Sir Harry then began his speech. He had about fifty pages of notes in his hand and he started to read them. It was a terrible speech, and I felt very sorry for him.

Sometimes he looked up from the papers, and then he could not say anything. Once or twice he forgot the subject of the speech but remembered a few sentences from a book. And he repeated them like a schoolboy. His ideas were quite wrong too. He talked about 'the German danger' and I almost laughed out loud.

'There's no German danger at all,' he said. 'The Government has invented it. The Germans want peace, and so we don't need a big army. We're wasting public money on guns and warships.'

I thought about Scudder's little black book! The Germans' plans for war were ready and they were not interested in peace.

I spoke after Sir Harry and talked about Australia. I described the country's politics and its plans and the work of the Liberal Government. The people listened very politely and sometimes cheered. But I forgot all about Free Trade!

The speakers were thanked at the end of the meeting. Sir Harry and I got into the car again and drove out of Brattleburn.

'That was a fine speech, Twisdon,' he said, 'and they enjoyed it. Did you hear them

cheer when you said the word "liberal"? Now we'll go home and you can have a good meal. I want you to stay at my house tonight.'

After dinner that night we sat by the fire and talked.

'Listen, Sir Harry,' I said. 'I want to tell you something and it's very important. You're a good fellow, so I won't hide anything from you. Your speech was all wrong.'

He looked very surprised. 'Was it?' he said. 'Do you mean about the German danger? Do you think they'll attack us?'

'They may attack us next month,' I said. 'Now listen to this story. A few days ago a German spy killed a friend of mine in London ...'

I can still remember the bright fire-light in Sir Harry's room. I lay back in a big chair and told him everything. I repeated all Scudder's notes and I even remembered about the thirty-nine steps and the tide. I described my adventures with the milkman and the police at the inn.

Then I said, 'The police are trying to arrest me for the murder. But I can prove that I didn't kill Scudder. The truth is that I'm afraid of these German spies. They're a lot wiser than the police. If the police arrested me, there would be an accident. And I should get a knife in my heart, like Scudder.'

Sir Harry was looking at me carefully. 'Are you a nervous man, Mr. Hannay?' he asked.

I did not answer him immediately. I took down a heavy knife from the wall and did an old Rhodesian trick for him. I threw the knife up in the air and caught it in my mouth. 'I learned to do that trick many years ago,' I said. 'But a nervous man couldn't do it.' He smiled. 'All right, Hannay. You needn't prove it. I may not know much about politics but I can recognize an honest man. I believe what you've said. Tell me what I can do to help you.'

'Well, your uncle is the Chief Secretary at the Foreign Office and he'll be able to do something. I want you to write a letter to him. Ask him if I can meet him before June 15th.'

'What name shall I say?'

'Twisdon. It's safer to forget the name Hannay.'

Sir Harry sat down at a table and wrote this letter.

Dear Uncle,

I have given your address to a man named Twisdon who wants to meet you. He hopes to see you before June 15th. Be kind to him, please, and believe his story.

When he comes, he'll say the words 'Black Stone'. And he'll sing a few lines of 'Annie Laurie'.

'Well, that looks all right,' Sir Harry said. 'My uncle's name is Sir Walter Bullivant, and his cottage is near Artinswell on the River Kennet. Now, what's the next thing?'

'Can you give me an old suit of clothes?' I said. 'And show me a map of Galloway. The police may come here to look for me, and you can show them the car in the valley. But don't tell them anything.'

'And if the spies come, what shall I say to them?'

'Say that I've gone to London.'

Sir Harry brought the clothes and a map of Galloway. I looked at the map carefully and noticed the railway to the south.

'That's the wildest part of the country,' Sir Harry said, pointing at the map. 'Go up the road here and then turn to the right. You ought to be up in the hills before breakfast. You'll be quite safe up there but you must travel south on June the 12th or 13th.'

He gave me an old bicycle and at two o'clock in the morning I left his house.

At five o'clock the sun rose, and I had travelled about twenty miles. High hills and

wide green valleys lay around me on every side.

CHAPTER 5: THE ROADMAN WHO WORE SPECTACLES

I rested for a time on the top of a hill. The road crossed a flat space in front of me and then ran down into a valley. A cottage stood among the fields below, but there were no other signs of life. I was so tired that I lay down and closed my eyes.

It was seven o'clock when a sound woke me. It was the plane again. I did not move. It flew over the hills in narrow circles. The next minute it turned towards me, and I could see the pilot and another man. Both men were looking at me. And I felt sure that they had recognized me. Then the machine climbed quickly and flew away to the east.

I had to escape from that place immediately. My enemies would return and search the hills. They had seen my bicycle of course, so I had to throw it away.

I left the road and pushed the bicycle about fifty yards. Then I noticed a hole full of water and threw the bicycle into it.

The day was warm and clear and I could see the road to the east and the west. There was nothing on it. But I was certain that my enemies would soon come down that road. So I turned across the hills to the north.

After a time I looked back across the valleys on both sides. My eyes are very good, and I saw some men walking far apart. They were all coming towards the high ground.

I ran forward but did not get very far. There were more men in front, searching the next valley. 'I can't get away from here,' I thought. 'If I try to escape, they'll see me. So I have to stay on the high ground and hide somewhere.'

I ran along the top of the hill and reached the road again. I turned a corner of the road and there I found the roadman.

His tools lay beside him and he was getting ready for work. But he was moving very slowly.

He looked up as I came near. 'This is a terrible job,' he said, 'and I can't do it today. I'm too ill to work, and that's the truth.'

He was a wild figure and he wore a pair of large spectacles. His eyes looked very red. 'What's the matter?' I asked, but I knew the answer. 'You do this job every day, don't you? Why can't you do it today?'

'I do,' he replied, 'but my daughter doesn't come home from London every day. She came home yesterday, and we had a party last night.' He took off his spectacles and then continued. 'I got very drunk last night and my head feels very bad.'

'I'm sorry,' I said. 'Bed is clearly the best place for you.'

'Ah, but it's not easy. I got a postcard yesterday. The new Road Surveyor is coming to see this work today. If I go home to bed, he won't find me here. And then I'll lose my job.'

Suddenly I had a wonderful idea. 'Listen,' I said. 'I may be able to help you. If you still feel too drunk to work, you'll have to go to bed. Does the new Surveyor know you very well?'

'No. I've never met him before but I've heard about him. He travels about in a little motor-car.'

'Where's your house?' I asked.

He pointed to the cottage down among the fields.

'Good. You go back to bed then and sleep in peace. I'll do your job for today. If the Surveyor doesn't know you, he won't know me either.'

He looked at me and laughed then. 'Well, you're a very nice fellow. It'll be quite easy too and you needn't do a lot of work.'

He pointed to a pile of stones and a hammer. 'I broke up those stones yesterday,' he said, 'and you needn't do any more of that. Take the barrow and go down the road. Keep on until you come to a pile of rocks. Bring them up here in the barrow. My name is Alexander Turnbull but my friends call me Specky. That's because I wear these glasses. When the Surveyor comes, you'll have to talk politely. And call him "Sir". He'll be quite happy then.'

'The Surveyor may know that you wear spectacles,' I said. 'Let me borrow them for today.'

He laughed again. 'Well, well, this is a fine trick.' He gave me his glasses and his dirty old hat.

I took off my coat and gave it to him. 'Take this home with you,' I said, 'and keep it for me.'

Then he left me.

Ten minutes later I was like a roadman myself. I had rubbed dust on my trousers and shoes. Turnbull's trousers were tied below the knee, and I had tied mine in the same way. Those German spies would notice everything, and I was afraid of my hands. They looked clean and rather soft, so I rubbed dirt on them.

Turnbull had left his food and an old newspaper beside the road. It was eight o'clock now, and I was feeling quite hungry. So I stole some of his bread and cheese and had a quick meal.

Then I began my new job and pushed the barrow up and down the road. While I was working, I remembered an old friend in Rhodesia. He was a policeman when I knew him. But he had done many strange things in his life. He had often been in danger and knew the value of a good disguise. He used to say, 'But a disguise alone isn't enough, Hannay. You must try to *be* another person and you must *believe* it yourself. If you can't do that, your disguise will soon fail.'

So now I believed that I was the roadman. And I thought about my life and my job. I lived in the little cottage in the valley. My daughter had come home the day before and we had had a party. I had got drunk and was still feeling sick. But the Surveyor wanted to see me today, and I had to wait for him.

I worked for an hour or more and got quite dirty. It was a very dusty job. Suddenly a voice spoke from the road and I looked up. A small motor-car had stopped and a young man was talking to me.

'Are you Alexander Turnbull?' he asked. 'I'm the new Road Surveyor, and my office is in the town hall at Newton-Stewart. The road looks all right here, Turnbull. There's a soft part about a mile away, and you must clean the edges. I'll be around here again next week. Good morning.'

He drove away, and I felt very glad. My disguise had been quite good enough for him. About eleven o'clock a farmer drove some sheep down the road. When he saw me, he stopped.

'What's happened to Specky?' he asked.

'He's ill,' I replied. 'I'm doing his job for a few days.'

About noon a big car came down the road. It went past me and stopped a hundred yards away. Three men got out of the car and walked slowly back towards me.

I had seen two of them before. They were the men who had visited the Galloway inn. One of them was thin and dark and the other was rather fat. But I did not know the third man who was older than the others.

'Good morning,' the third man said. 'You have a fine easy job here.'

I did not answer at once. I put down the handles of the barrow and stood up slowly. They were looking at me carefully, and their eyes missed nothing.

'There are worse jobs than this,' I said, 'but there may be better ones too. I'd rather have yours and sit all day in that big car.'

The man who had spoken was looking at Turnbull's newspaper.

'Do you get the papers every day?' he asked.

'Yes, I get them but they're three or four days late.'

He picked up the paper and looked at the date on it. Then he put it down again. The thin fellow was looking at my shoes and spoke a few words in German.

Then the older man said, 'You have a fine pair of shoes. Did you buy them here?'

'I did not,' I said. 'These shoes came from London. I got them from the gentleman who was hunting here last year. Now what was his name?' And I rubbed my ear so as to remember the name.

The fat man now spoke in German. 'Let's go,' he said. 'This fellow is all right.'

They asked me one more question. 'Did anyone go past here early this morning? Perhaps he was riding a bicycle.'

I thought about this question for a moment. Then I said, 'Well, I was a bit late this morning. My daughter came home from London yesterday and we had a party last night. I opened the door about seven o'clock, and there was nobody on the road then.' The three men said good-bye to me and went back to their car. Three minutes later they drove away.

I felt very glad that they had gone. But I continued to work. This was wise too because the car soon returned. The three men looked at me again as they went past. I finished Turnbull's bread and cheese and by five o'clock I had finished the work. But I was not sure about the next step. I felt certain that my enemies were still around the place. If I walked away, they would stop me. But I had to get away from them. I decided to go down to Turnbull's cottage. I would take his things back to him and get my coat. I would stay there until it was dark. And then I hoped to escape across the hills.

But suddenly another car came down the road and stopped. There was one man in it and he called to me.

'Have you got any matches?'

I looked at him and recognized him at once. This was a very lucky chance. His name was Marmaduke Jopley, and I had met him once or twice in London. I hated the fellow. He was a friend of rich young men and old ladies who often invited him to their homes. Well, Jopley was such a weak fellow that he could not hurt me. And I decided to act quickly.

'Hullo, Jopley,' I said. 'I'm surprised to see you here.'

His face grew pale. 'Who are you?' he asked in a nervous voice.

'Hannay,' I said. 'From Rhodesia. Don't you remember me?'

'Hannay the murderer!' he cried.

'That's right. Now listen to me. If you don't obey me quickly, I'll be Jopley's murderer too. Give me your coat and cap.'

He was so afraid that he obeyed immediately. I put on his new coat over my dusty clothes and put his cap on my head. Then I gave him Turnbull's spectacles and dirty old hat.

'Wear them for a few minutes,' I said. 'They're a very good disguise.'

I was wondering which way to go. Jopley had come from the east, and I decided to go back that way. If my enemies were watching the road, they would recognize the car. But I did not think that they would stop it. So I turned the car and drove away.

'Now, Jopley,' I said, 'if you're a good fellow, I won't hurt you. But don't try any tricks and don't talk. Remember that I'm a murderer. If you cause any trouble, I'll kill you.'

We drove eight miles along the valley. Several men were standing on the corners as we drove past. They looked carefully at the car but did not try to stop us. About seven o'clock I turned into a narrow road and drove up into the hills.

The villages and cottages were soon behind us. At last I stopped the car at a quiet place and turned it for Jopley. I gave him his coat and cap and took back Turnbull's spectacles and the old hat.

'Thank you,' I said. 'Now you can go and find the police.'

He drove away. I watched the red light of his car as it disappeared in the distance.

CHAPTER 6: THE STRANGE HOUSE ON THE MOOR

It was a cold night and I was very hungry. Turnbull still had my coat, and my watch and Scudder's note-book were in a pocket of it. My money was in my trousers' pocket. I lay down in some long grass but could not sleep.

I thought about all the people who had helped me. And I decided that I had been a very lucky man.

Food was my chief problem. I closed my eyes and saw thick pieces of meat on a white plate. I remembered all the meals that I had eaten in London. I used to refuse fruit after dinner! Now I would give five pounds for an apple.

Towards morning I slept a little but woke again about six o'clock. I sat up and looked down into the valley. I lay back immediately in great surprise.

Men were searching the long grass below and they were only a quarter of a mile away.

I crawled a few yards and hid behind a rock. There I noticed a crack that ran to the top of the hill. I crawled into this crack and began to climb. When I reached the top, I raised my head again. My enemies were still searching the long grass.

I rolled over the hill-top to the other side. No one could see me there, so I ran for half a mile. Then I climbed to the top again and stood up straight. The men saw me at once and moved towards me. I ran back over the hill-top and returned to my first

place. My enemies were now going the wrong way, and I felt safer. My best plan was to go to the north, and I chose my path carefully. Soon a wide valley lay between me and my enemies. But when they discovered their mistake, they turned back quickly. I saw them suddenly above the hill-top, and they began to shout at me. I noticed then that they were not my real enemies. Two of them were policemen.

Jopley has reported me,' I thought, 'and now they're looking for the murderer.' Two men ran down and began to climb my side of the valley. The policemen ran across the hill-tops to the north. I felt afraid now because these men knew the country. I had strong legs and plenty of breath but did not know the best paths. I left my hill-top and ran down towards a river. A road ran beside the river, and I noticed a gate at the side of the road. I jumped over the gate and ran across a field. The path led through a group of trees where I stopped and looked back. The police were half a mile behind me.

I crossed a low wall beyond the trees and stood in a farmyard. The farmhouse was about fifty yards away.

There was a glass building at the side of the house, and an old gentleman was sitting at a desk inside. He looked at me as I walked towards the building.

The room was full of books and cases which contained old stone tools and broken pots. I saw several boxes of old coins. Books and papers covered the old gentleman's desk.

He was a, kind old man with a round face and a bald head. And he was wearing a pair of large spectacles. When I went in, he did not move or speak.

I could not say a word either. I looked at him and noticed his eyes. They were small and bright and very clear. His bald head was shining like a glass bottle.

Then he said slowly, 'You are in a hurry, my friend.'

I pointed across the farmyard and the field. Some figures were climbing over the gate beside the road.

'Ah, they're policemen,' he said, 'and you're running away from them. Well, we can talk about it later. I don't want the police to come in here. If you go into the next room, you'll see two doors. Go through the doorway on the left side and shut it behind you. You'll be quite safe in there.'

Then he picked up a pen and went on with his work.

I obeyed him at once. I went into the next room and through the left-hand doorway. It was very dark inside, and there was only one window which was high up in the wall. I was safe from the police in that room but I was not very happy. Indeed, I felt suspicious. Everything was so easy that I began to wonder. 'Why did that old fellow help me?' I asked myself. 'I've never seen him before, and he didn't ask me any questions.'

While I was waiting, I thought about food again. I made plans for my breakfast., and it was very exciting. I would have bacon and eggs. The old man could not refuse to give me that. I could eat a pound of bacon and a dozen eggs. I was thinking about this meal when the door opened.

A man who was standing outside made a sign to me. And I followed him to the old gentleman's room.

'Have the police gone?' I asked.

'Yes. They asked me if you had come here. But I didn't tell them anything important. This is a lucky morning for you, Mr. Richard Hannay.'

He spoke quietly and seemed very young now. I was watching him all the time. He closed his eyes but they were only half shut, like a bird's eyes. And I suddenly remembered what Scudder had told me. 'If you see his eyes, Hannay,' he had said, 'you'll never forget them.'

Was this man Scudder's worst enemy? And was I now in the enemy's house? I would kill the old man if these thoughts were true.

He guessed my plan and smiled. Then his eyes moved to the door behind me. I turned and saw two men with guns in their hands.

He knew my name but he had never seen me before. And this was my only chance.

'What are you talking about?' I asked. 'My name isn't Richard Hannay. It's Ainslie.'

'Is it? But of course you have other names. We won't quarrel about a name.' He was still smiling at me.

I thought of another plan quickly. I had no coat and my clothes were still very dirty.

They were quite a good disguise for me, so I began to tell a story.

'Why did you save me from the police?' I asked. 'I didn't want to steal that money. It has caused me so much trouble that you can have it.' And I took four sovereigns from my pocket and threw them on the old man's desk.

'Take it,' I said, 'and let me go.'

'Oh, no, Mr. Hannay, I won't let you go. You know too much for me to allow that. You're acting very well but you can't deceive me.'

I wondered if he was sure about me. For a moment I saw a little doubt in his eyes.

'I don't want to deceive you,' I said. 'Why don't you believe me? I stole that money because I was hungry. The two men left the car and went away after the accident. I climbed down the bank and found the money on the floor of the car. The police have been hunting me since then, and I'm very tired.'

The old man was clearly in doubt now. He was still suspicious of me, but we had never met before. And that made him careful.

'Tell me your adventures,' he said. 'What happened to you yesterday?'

'I can't. I haven't eaten anything for two days. Give me a meal first, and then I'll tell you everything.'

He made a sign to one of the men who brought me some cold bacon and a glass of milk. Suddenly, while I was eating, the old man spoke to me in German. It was a trick of course, so I did not look up or answer him.

When I had finished, I began my story again. I had come from Leith and was going to visit my brother in Wigtown. I was not travelling by train because I had only a little money. On my way I saw an accident. A car ran off the road and fell into a little valley.

A man had jumped out of the car before it fell. And then another man appeared. They talked for a few moments and then went away together. I went down to the car. It was completely destroyed, but I found the four sovereigns on the floor. I put the money in my pocket and ran away.

I went into a shop in the nearest village and tried to buy some food. I offered a sovereign to the shop-keeper. She was suspicious and called the police. I escaped, but the policeman tore my coat completely off.

'Well,' I cried, 'they can have the money back. A poor man hasn't got a chance.'

'That's a good story, Hannay,' the old man said. 'But I don't believe it.' Then he sat back in his chair and began to rub his right ear.

'It's the truth,' I shouted. 'My name is Ainslie, not Hannay. Those policemen knew me and were shouting my name from the hill-top.'

I looked at the bright eyes and the bald head in front of me. I knew that his doubts were growing. He had never seen my face. It was different from my photographs. And my clothes were very old and dirty.

'You'll have to stay here,' he said at last. 'If you aren't Richard Hannay, you'll be quite safe. But if you are Hannay, I'll kill you myself. I'll soon discover the truth.'

He rang a bell and another man came in.

'Bring the car,' he said. 'There'll be three for dinner.'

He looked at me carefully again, and there was something quite terrible in his eyes. They were cold and cruel, like the bright eyes of a snake. I could not look away from them. They made me weak, like a child, and I wanted to crawl to him. He was Scudder's worst enemy. But I would have served him if he had asked me!

He was rubbing his right ear again. Then he spoke in German to one of the men. And when I heard his words, my strange thoughts left me.

'Karl, put this fellow in the store-room and don't let him escape. Remember that.,' he said.

The store-room was very dark, but the two men did not come inside with me. They sat down outside where I could hear them talking. I felt around the walls of the room and touched several boxes and barrels. Then I sat down on one of the boxes to think about my difficulties.

The old man and his friends would soon return and recognize me. They would remember the roadman because I was still wearing Turnbull's clothes. I could guess their questions: why were the police looking for a roadman? Why was he found twenty miles away from his job? They would remember Marmaduke Jopley too, I thought, and probably Sir Harry. I could not continue to deceive these foreign enemies and I would be alone with them here. My chances of escape were not very great.

Suddenly I grew angry and hated these German spies in Britain. I would not sit in this dark place and do nothing. I had to attack them or try to escape.

I got up and walked around the room again. The boxes and barrels were too strong for me to open, but then I reached a cupboard in the wall. It was probably locked because I could not open it. But there was a crack in the door. I pushed my fingers through the crack and then pulled hard. The door of the cupboard broke open. There were some strange things inside. The first things I found were half a dozen electric lamps. They were in good condition too, and I shone a light around the cupboard.

There were bottles and small boxes and some dusty yellow bags. I found a box of detonators which were complete with long fuses. I took out the detonators and fuses and laid them carefully on the floor. At the back of the cupboard I found a strong box. At first I thought that it was locked. But it opened quite easily, and it was full of sticks of dynamite.

I could destroy the house with this dynamite. I had often used it in Rhodesia and I knew its power. It could very easily destroy me too! This was clearly a chance of escape, and it would probably be my only chance. So I decided to take it.

I found a crack in the floor near the doorway. I pushed a stick of dynamite into the crack and fixed a detonator and fuse to it. Then I moved one of the boxes until it stood over the crack.

I sat down near the cupboard and lit the fuse. I watched the fire as it moved along the fuse. The two men were still talking quietly outside the door ...

Suddenly there was a terrible noise, and great heat and light rushed up from the floor. They hung for a moment in the air, and then clouds of dust took their place. Thick yellow smoke filled the room, and at first I could not see anything. But there was light in the room now. A great hole had appeared in the wall, and I ran towards it. The air outside was also full of smoke and dust, and I could hear the sound of voices.

I climbed through the hole and ran forward. I was in the farmyard at the back of the house. About thirty yards away there was a high stone bird-house. The building had no doors or windows but there were many little holes for the birds. And the roof seemed flat.

If I could reach that roof, I should be safe. They would not look for me up there, I thought.

I ran through the smoke to the back of the bird-house. Then I began to climb. It was hard work, and I went up very slowly. But at last I reached the top and lay down behind a low wall.

The dust and smoke had made me sick, and I felt very tired. But I was safe up there and soon I fell asleep.

I probably slept for several hours. When I woke up, the afternoon sun was very strong. I could hear men's voices again and the sound of a motor-car. I raised myself a little and looked over the wall.

Four or five men were walking across the farmyard to the house. The old man was with them and he was clearly very angry. He pointed across the fields and said something in German to the servants. The thin dark fellow was there and the fat one too.

I lay on the roof of the bird-house all the afternoon. I was very thirsty. There was a little river beside the farm and I could hear the sound of water. I felt the money in my pocket. I would have given forty pounds for a glass of water if I had had the chance! Two men drove away in the car. A little later another man rode to the east on a horse. The search was beginning, but they were all going the wrong way!

I sat up on the roof and looked around. At first I saw nothing specially interesting but then I noticed a large circle of trees. These trees were half a mile from the house, and there was a flat green field inside the circle.

'That must be an airfield,' I thought. 'It's a wonderful place for a secret airfield.'

It would deceive anyone who did not know the place. A small plane could land there and no one would see it. The field was completely hidden from the ground. Anybody would think that the plane had flown over the hill. No one would guess that it had landed among the trees.

Then I noticed a thin blue line far away to the south. It was the sea. So our enemies had this secret airfield in Scotland, and they could watch our ships every day. The thought made me very angry.

It made me nervous too. If the plane came back, the pilot would easily see me. But I could do nothing until it was dark.

I lay and waited on the roof of the bird-house. About six o'clock a man came out through the hole in the store-room. He walked slowly towards the bird-house, and I felt quite afraid for a moment. But then we both heard the plane at the same time. The fellow turned immediately and went back into the store-room.

The plane did not fly over the house, and I was glad about that it flew around the trees once and then landed. Some lights shone for a moment or two, and ten minutes later I heard voices. After that everything was quiet, and it began to grow dark.

I waited until nine o'clock perhaps. Then I climbed down from the roof and reached the ground safely. I crawled away from the bird-house on my hands and knees.

I went first to the little river where I lay and drank the cool water. Then I began to run. I wanted to get as far away as possible from that terrible house.

CHAPTER 7: THE FISHERMAN

I was free now but I felt rather sick. I could still smell the smoke of the dynamite and an hour later I had to rest.

It was about eleven o'clock when I reached the road safely. I wanted to go back to Mr. Turnbull's cottage. My coat was there, with Scudder's note-book in the pocket, and I had to have that book. My plan then was to find the railway and travel to the south. After that I would go straight to Artinswell to meet Sir Walter Bullivant.

It was a beautiful night. I knew that Turnbull's cottage was about eighteen miles away. It was too far for me to walk before morning. So I decided to hide during the day and travel only at night.

When the sun rose, I was near a river. I washed in the clean cold water because I was very dirty. My shirt and trousers were torn, and I was afraid to meet anyone in that condition. But a little beyond the river I came to a cottage. And I was so hungry that I had to stop there.

The man was away from the house, and at first his wife was suspicious of me. She picked up an axe and seemed quite ready to attack me.

'I've had a bad fall in the hills,' I said, 'and I'm feeling ill. Will you help me?'

She did not ask any questions but invited me into the house. She gave me a glass of milk and some bread and cheese. Then I sat by the fire in her kitchen and we talked. I offered her a sovereign for her trouble, but she refused it at first.

'If it isn't your money, I don't want it,' she said.

I grew quite angry. 'But it is my money. Do you think that I have stolen it?'

She accepted it then and unlocked a cupboard in the wall. She took out and gave me a warm Scottish plaid and one of her husband's hats. When I left her cottage, I was like a real Scotsman!

I walked for two or three hours. Then the weather changed and it began to rain. But I kept warm and dry under the plaid. A little later I came to a large rock which hung over some low ground. The grass under the rock was quite dry. So I lay down and slept there all day.

When I woke up, it was almost dark. The weather was still wet and cold, and I was uncertain about the way. Twice I took the wrong path and probably walked twenty miles. But at six o'clock in the morning I reached Mr. Turnbull's cottage.

Mr. Turnbull opened the door himself, but he did not recognize me. 'Who are you?' he asked. 'Why do you come here on a Sunday morning? I'm just getting ready to go to church.'

I had forgotten the days of the week. Every day had seemed the same to me. I felt so ill that I could not answer him. But then he recognized me.

'Have you got my glasses?' he asked.

I took them out of my pocket and gave them to him.

'Of course you've come back for your coat,' he said. 'Come in, man. You look very ill. Wait. I'll get you a chair.'

When I was in Rhodesia, I had often had malaria. And it was still in my body. I knew the signs of it very well. Now the rain and the cold had brought it back again. But soon Mr. Turnbull was taking off my clothes and leading me to the bed.

I stayed with him for ten days, and he looked after me very well. The malaria lasted

about six days. Then my body grew cool again and I got up. He went out to work every morning and returned in the evening. I used to rest all day. He had a cow which gave us milk. And there was always some food in the house. One evening I said, 'There's a small airfield about fifteen miles away. Have you ever seen it? A little plane lands there sometimes. Do you know who owns the place?' 'I don't know,' he said. 'I've seen the plane, of course, but I don't know anything about it.'

He brought me several newspapers while I was staying with him. And I read them with interest. But I saw nothing about the murder in London.

Turnbull did not ask me any questions, not even my name. I was surprised about this, and one day I said, 'Has anyone asked you about me?'

'There was a man in a motor-car,' he said. 'He stopped one day and asked me about the other roadman. That was you of course. He seemed such a strange fellow that I didn't tell him anything.'

When I left the cottage, I gave Turnbull five pounds. He did not want to take the money at all. His face grew red, and he was quite rude to me. But at last he took it and said, 'I don't want money. When I was ill, you helped me. Now you've been ill, and I've helped you. It isn't worth a lot of money.'

The weather was beautiful that morning, but I was beginning to feel nervous. It was the 12th of June, and I had to finish Scudder's business before the 15th.

I had dinner at a quiet inn in Moffat and then went to the railway station. It was seven o'clock in the evening.

'What time does the train go to London?' I asked.

'Ten minutes to twelve,' the railway man said.

It was a long time to wait, so I left the station. I found a quiet place near a hill-top and lay down there to sleep. I was so tired that I slept until twenty minutes to twelve. Then I ran down to the station where the train was waiting.

I decided not to go to London. I got out of the train at Crewe and waited there for two hours. The next train took me to Birmingham, and I reached Reading at six o'clock in the evening. Two hours later I was looking for Sir Walter Bullivant's cottage at Artinswell.

The River Kennet flowed beside the road. The English air was sweet and warm, quite different from Scottish air. I stood for a few minutes on a bridge which crossed the river. And I began to sing 'Annie Laurie' in a low voice.

A fisherman came up from the bank of the river. As he walked towards me, he began to sing 'Annie Laurie' also.

The fisherman was a great big fellow. He was wearing an old pair of grey trousers and a large hat. He looked at me and smiled. And I thought that he had a wise and honest face. Then he looked down with me at the water.

'It's clean and clear, isn't it?' he said. 'The Kennet's a fine river. Look at that big fish down there. But the sun has gone now. If you tried all night, you wouldn't catch him.'

'Where?' I said. 'I can't see him.'

'Look. Down there. A yard from those water plants.'

'Oh, yes. I can see him now. He's like a big black stone, isn't he?'

'Ah,' he said, and sang a few more words of 'Annie Laurie'.

He was still looking down at the water as he said, 'Your name is Twisdon, I believe.'

'No,' I said. Then I suddenly remembered my other names and added quickly, 'Oh, yes, that's right.'

He laughed. 'A good spy always knows his own name,' he said.

Some men were crossing the bridge behind us, and Sir Walter raised his voice.

'No, I won't,' he said. 'You're strong enough to work, aren't you? You can get a meal from my kitchen, but I won't give you a penny.'

The men went past, and the fisherman moved away from me. He pointed to a white gate a hundred yards away and said, 'That's my house. Wait here for five minutes and then go around to the back door.'

When I reached his cottage, the back door was open. Sir Walter's butler was waiting to welcome me.

'Come this way, sir,' he said, and he led me up the stairs. He took me into one of the bedrooms. There was a complete set of clothes on the bed. I noticed a dinner-suit and a clean white shirt. But there were other clothes too and several pairs of shoes.

'I hope that these things will fit you, sir,' the butler said. 'Your bath is ready in the

next room. I'll ring the bell for dinner at nine o'clock, sir.'

When he had gone out, I sat down. I thought that I was dreaming. At this time the day before I had been asleep on a Scottish hill-top. Now I was in this wonderful house, and Sir Walter did not even know my name.

I had a bath and then put on the white shirt and the dinner-suit. Everything fitted me very well. The bell rang for dinner, and I went down to meet Sir Walter.

'You're very kind, sir,' I said, 'but I must tell you the truth. I haven't done anything wrong, but the police are looking for me at this moment.'

He smiled. 'That's all right. We can talk about these things after dinner. I'm glad that you got here safely.'

I enjoyed that meal, and the wine was good too. Sir Walter was an interesting man who had travelled in many foreign countries. I talked about Rhodesia and the fish in the Zambezi River, and he told me some of his adventures.

After dinner we went into his library, and the butler brought us coffee. It was a very nice room, with books and fine pictures around the walls. I decided to buy a house like that when I had finished Scudder's work.

Sir Walter lay back in his chair.

'I've obeyed Harry's orders,' he said. 'And now I'm ready to listen, Mr. Hannay. You've got some news, I believe.'

I was surprised to hear my real name, but I began my story. And I told him everything. I described my meeting with Scudder and his fears about Karolides. I told him about the murder and my adventure with the milkman.

'Where did you go then?' he asked.

'I went to Galloway. I soon discovered the secret of Scudder's code and then I could read his notes.'

'Have you still got them?'

'Yes.'

Then I described my meeting with Sir Harry and how I had helped him at Brattleburn. Sir Walter laughed. 'Harry can't make a speech,' he said. 'He's a very good fellow but his ideas are all wrong. Go on with your story, Mr. Hannay.'

I told him about Turnbull then and my job as a roadman.

He was very interested in that.

'Can you describe those fellows in the car?' he asked.

'Well, one of them was thin and dark. I had seen him before at the inn with the fat one. But I didn't know the third man who was older than the others.'

'And what happened after that?'

'I met Marmaduke Jopley next, and had a bit of fun with him.' Sir Walter laughed again when I described that part of the story. But he did not laugh at the bald old man in the farmhouse.

'How did you escape from the place?' he asked.

'I found dynamite, fuses and detonators in a cupboard,' I replied, 'and I almost destroyed the building. There's a small airfield there where the plane lands. After that I was ill for a week with malaria. It would have been worse if I hadn't had the thick plaid. And Turnbull looked after me very well. Then I travelled south by train, and here I am.'

Sir Walter stood up slowly and looked down at me.

'You needn't be afraid of the police, Hannay,' he said. 'They aren't looking for you now.'

I was surprised to hear this.

'Why?' I cried. 'Have they found the murderer?'

'No, not yet. But the police know that you didn't kill Scudder.'

'How do they know that?'

'Because I received a letter from Scudder. He had done several jobs for me, and I knew him quite well. He was a good spy with only one fault.'

'What was that?'

'He always wanted to work alone, and he failed for that reason. The best spies always work with other spies, but Scudder couldn't do that. I was very sorry about it because he was a fine fellow and a very brave man. I had a letter from him on May 31st.'

'But he was dead then. He was murdered on May 23rd, wasn't he?'

'Yes, and he wrote the letter on the 23rd. He was always trying to deceive his enemies. So he sent the letter first to Spain, and then it came back to England.'

'What did he write about?'

'He told me that Britain was in great danger. He also said that he was staying with a good friend. And I believe that the "good friend" was you, Hannay. He promised to write again soon.'

'What did you do then?'

'I went to the police immediately. They had discovered your name and we sent a telegram to Rhodesia. The answer was all right, so we were not suspicious about you. I guessed why you had left London. You wanted to continue Scudder's work, didn't you? Then I got Harry's letter and I guessed that Twisdon was Richard Hannay.' I was very glad to hear all this. My country's enemies were my enemies, but the police were now my friends. And I was a free man again!

The big fisherman sat down and smiled at me.

'Show me Scudder's notes,' he said.

I took out the little book and began to explain the code to him. He was very quick and he knew what the names meant. We worked hard for an hour or more.

'Scudder was right about one thing,' he said. 'A French officer is coming to London on June 15th, and that's the day after tomorrow. I thought that it was all secret. Of course we know that there are a few German spies in England. We've got some of our fellows in Germany too. But how did they all discover the secret of this Frenchman's visit? I don't believe Scudder's story about war and the Black Stone. He used to have some strange ideas.'

Sir Walter stood up again and walked about the room. 'The Black Stone,' he repeated. '*Der Schwarzestein*. It's like something out of a cheap story, isn't it? I don't believe the part about Karolides either. He's an important man, I know, but nobody wants to kill him. There may be some danger which Scudder had heard about. But it isn't very important. It's the usual spy business which the Germans enjoy very much. Sometimes they kill a man, as they killed Scudder. And the German Government pays them for it.'

The butler came into the room.

'It's the telephone, sir,' he said. 'Your office in London. Mr. Heath wants to speak to you.'

Sir Walter left the library. When he returned a few minutes later, he looked quite pale. 'Scudder was right,' he said, 'and I was wrong. Karolides is dead. He was shot about three hours ago.'

CHAPTER 8: THE COMING OF THE BLACK STONE

In the morning the butler took away the dinner-suit and brought me some other clothes.

I went down to breakfast and found Sir Walter at the table. There was a telegram in his hand.

'I've been busy during the night,' he said. 'I spoke to the Foreign Secretary and to the Secretary for War. They telephoned to the First Lord of the Admiralty, and they're bringing the Frenchman to London today instead of tomorrow. His name's Royer, and he'll be here at five o'clock this evening. This telegram is from the First Lord of the Admiralty.'

He pointed to the hot food on the table, and I began to eat. It was a very good breakfast.

'I don't think that this change is going to help us,' he continued. 'Our enemies found out the first date, so they'll probably find out the new one too. There must be a German spy in the Foreign Office or in the War Office. Only five men knew that Royer was coming. We believed so, but someone told Scudder and the Germans.'

'Can't you change your plans for war?' I asked.

'We can but we don't want to. We've thought a lot about these plans and they're the best possible ones.'

'But if it's necessary, you will change them.'

'Perhaps. It's a difficult problem, Hannay. Our enemies aren't children. They're not going to steal any papers from Royer. They want to know our plans, but they want to get them in secret. Then Royer will go back to France and say, "Here are the British plans for war, and they're completely secret. The Germans don't know anything about

them."

'Then you must give the Frenchman a special guard,' I said, 'who will stay by his side all the time.'

'Royer is having dinner with the Foreign Secretary tonight. Then he's coming to my house where he'll meet four people. They are Sir Arthur Drew, General Winstanley, Mr. Whittaker and me. The First Lord hasn't been well for a few days, so Whittaker is coming instead. And he's bringing the plans from the First Lord's office at the Admiralty. We'll deliver them to Royer who will then leave for Portsmouth. A warship is waiting there to take him to France. He'll have a special guard all the time.'

After breakfast we left for London by car.

Sir Walter said!, 'I'm taking you to Scotland Yard, Hannay. I want you to meet the Commissioner of Police.'

It was half past eleven when we reached Scotland Yard. We walked into the great dark building, and I met the Commissioner. His name was MacGillivray.

'I've brought you the murderer,' Sir Walter said.

The officer smiled. 'I'd be very happy if you had brought the real murderer, Bullivant.

Good morning, Mr. Hannay. You must be a very interesting man.'

'And he's going to tell you some interesting things,' Sir Walter said, 'but not today. You have to wait for twenty-four hours, I'm afraid. Mr. Hannay is a free man now, isn't he?'

'Yes, of course,' the Commissioner said. Then he turned to me. 'Do you want to go back to your old flat? It's ready for you, but perhaps you'd like to move.'

I was thinking about Scudder and could not reply.

'Well,' Sir Walter said, 'I must go now. Perhaps we'll need some of your men, MacGillivray, tonight or tomorrow. There may be some trouble.'

As we were leaving, Sir Walter took my hand.

'You're all right now, Hannay,' he said. 'You'll be quite safe in London. Come and see me tomorrow. But don't talk about these spies, will you? It's best to stay in your flat today.' He laughed suddenly. 'If these Black Stone people see you, they'll kill you.'

When Sir Walter had gone, I felt quite alone. I was a free man, and everything was all right. But I was very nervous. I went to the Savoy Hotel and ordered a fine meal. But I did not enjoy it. People were looking at me, and I thought, 'Do they recognize me? Have they seen my photograph in the newspapers?' I soon left the hotel.

In the afternoon I got a taxi and rode several miles to North London. I paid the taxi-man and then began to walk back. I walked for several hours and at last came to the centre of London again. I was feeling very unhappy.

It was six o'clock, and great things were happening in London. Royer had already arrived. Sir Walter was busy at the Foreign Office or making plans for the meeting. The Black Stone spies were watching and waiting quietly. But what was I doing? I was walking about the centre of London.

Suddenly a strange thought came into my head. I believed that there was great danger in London that day. And it was such a danger that only I could fight against. But what could I do? Sir Walter did not need me. I could not walk into a meeting of important officers and Ministers. I could look for the German spies of course. And if I found them, I would fight them. I was quite sure of one thing: my country needed me in this trouble. If I did not destroy their plans, the German spies would win.

'But is that true, Hannay?' I said to my-self. 'Can't Sir Walter and his friends easily look after Britain? Doesn't the First Lord of the Admiralty know his business better than you do? Can a few German spies do anything against all this power?'

I was not sure. There was a little voice in my ear which repeated the same words: 'Do something, Hannay. Get up and do something now, or you'll never sleep well again.'

At half past nine I was walking along Jermyn Street. And I decided what to do. I would go to Sir Walter's house. I knew the address and I could easily find it. He did not want to see me, but I had to do something.

I came to Duke Street and walked past a group of young men. They were wearing dinner-suits and had just come from a hotel. One of the young men was Mr. Marmaduke Jopley.

He saw me and recognized me at once.

'Look!' he cried. 'It's the murderer! Hold him! Hold him! That's Hannay the murderer!' Jopley caught my arm, and the others rushed to help him. A policeman ran across the street. I hit Jopley hard with my left hand and saw him fall. But then the crowd held

me and I could not move.

'What's the matter here?' the policeman said.

That's Hannay the murderer,' Jopley shouted.

Oh, be quiet,' I said. 'I'm not a murderer. Listen, officer. Take my advice and don't arrest me. The Commissioner knows all about me. I was at Scotland Yard this morning.'

'Now young man, come along with me,' the policeman said. 'I saw you begin this quarrel.' He pointed at Jopley who was still on the ground. 'That gentleman didn't do anything to you, but I saw you hit him. Now come along quietly to the police station.' I felt very angry indeed. I heard the little voice in my ear again. 'You must escape,' it said. 'Don't waste a minute here.'

Suddenly I felt as strong as an elephant. I turned quickly and threw the policeman to the ground. I pushed the other men away and ran along Duke Street.

I can run very fast when I want to. And that evening I almost flew. In a few minutes I reached Pall Mall and turned towards St. James's Park. I ran between the taxis in the Mall and crossed the bridge. There were very few people in the park and no one stopped me. Sir Walter's house was at Queen Anne's Gate and there I began to walk. Three or four motor-cars were standing in the street outside the house. I walked up to the door and rang the bell.

The butler opened the door at once. I could hear cries in the distance, but the street was empty.

'I must see Sir Walter,' I said. 'My business is very important.'

'Come in, sir,' he said. 'I'm afraid you can't see him immediately. But you can wait in the hall until the meeting is over.'

It was an old house with a large square hall. Doors led into several rooms on each side. A guard who was dressed in plain clothes stood outside one of the doors. I sat down in a corner near the telephone.

I made a sign to the butler. 'I'm in trouble again,' I said. 'But I'm working for Sir Walter, and he knows all about it. The police and a crowd of people are following me and may come here. Please don't tell them that I'm here. And don't let them come in.' 'All right, sir,' he replied.

A minute or two later I heard voices outside. The door-bell rang and the butler went to answer it. Someone spoke to him from outside, and he suddenly stood up very straight.

'I am sorry,' he said. 'This is Sir Walter Bullivant's house, and Sir Walter is Chief Secretary at the Foreign Office. I'm afraid that I don't know anything about a murderer. Now please go away, or I shall call the police myself.'

Then he shut the door and walked back through the hall.

Two minutes later the bell rang again, and a gentleman came in. While he was taking off his coat, I saw his face. It was a famous face, and I had often seen his photograph in the newspapers. The gentleman was Lord Alloa, the First Lord of the Admiralty. He was a big man with a large nose and bright blue eyes.

He walked past me, and the guard opened the door of the room for him.

I waited in the hall for twenty minutes. And during this time the little voice was still speaking in my ear. 'Don't go away,' it said. 'You'll soon be needed.' A little bell rang at the back of the house. And the butler immediately came into the hall. The First Lord left the meeting-room, and the butler gave him his coat. I looked at the gentleman for a moment, and he looked straight at me. It all happened very quickly. My heart jumped suddenly because I noticed a light in his eyes. I had never met the First Lord before, and he had never met me. But there was no doubt at all about that sudden light in his eyes. It meant that he had recognized me. He looked away at once and walked to the door. The butler opened it for him and closed it behind him.

I picked up the telephone-book and quickly found Lord Alloa's telephone number. I rang and the butler answered.

'Is the First Lord at home?' I asked.

'Yes, sir,' the voice said. 'But he's not very well. He's been in bed since this afternoon. Can I give him a message, sir?'

'No, thank you,' I said, and I put the telephone down.

I crossed the hall quickly to the meeting-room and went in without knocking.

Five surprised faces looked up from a round table. Sir Walter was there and Drew, the War Minister. I easily recognized Sir Arthur Drew from his photographs in the papers.

I had seen General Winstanley before, and an older man who was probably Whittaker stood next to him. The fifth man was short and fat with a dark grey moustache. Sir Walter looked quite angry.

'This is Mr. Hannay, gentlemen,' he said. 'I've already told you something about him. But why have you come here, Hannay? You know that we're very busy.'

'Your enemies are busy too, sir,' I said. 'And one of them has just left this room.'

Sir Walter's face grew red as he said, 'But that was Lord Alloa.'

'It was not,' I cried. 'Lord Alloa has been in bed since this afternoon. I have just spoken to his butler on the telephone. The gentleman who was here recognized me. And Lord Alloa doesn't know me.'

'Then... who... who...?' someone asked.

'The Black Stone,' I cried. I looked around the table and saw doubt and fear in five pairs of eyes.

CHAPTER 9: THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS

'But that can't be true,' Mr. Whittaker said. 'Lord Alloa told me that he probably wouldn't come to the meeting. But I know him very well and was not surprised to see him here. You're quite wrong about this, Hannay.'

Sir Walter went out of the room and spoke to someone on the telephone. When he came back, his face had turned pale.

'I've spoken to Alloa,' he said. 'He got out of bed to come to the telephone. Hannay is right. The gentleman who was here was not Lord Alloa.'

'I don't believe it,' General Winstanley said. 'Alloa was standing beside me ten minutes ago.'

'Gentlemen,' I said, 'the Black Stone knows its business. You probably didn't look at the man carefully. You were talking about these important plans. The fellow was like Lord Alloa, and so you accepted him. But it was another man, and I have probably seen him during the past month.'

Then the Frenchman spoke. 'This young man is right,' he said slowly and in good English. 'Our enemies know their business very well. Listen and I'll tell you a true story. It happened many years ago when I was in Senegal. I was living at a hotel but every day I used to go fishing. The river was a few miles away and I used to ride there on a little horse.'

'Well, one day I packed my dinner as usual and hung it over the horse's neck. Then I left for the river. When I arrived there, I tied the horse to a tree. I fished for several hours, and I was thinking only about the fish. I didn't take any notice of the horse at all, but I could hear her. And I could see her shape from the corner of my eye. She was moving about a lot and crying a bit too. I spoke to her as usual, but I did not look up from the water.'

'Well, dinner-time came, so I put the fish into a bag and walked along the river bank. I was still fishing carefully and watching the water. When I reached the tree, I threw the bag on to the horse's back...'

The Frenchman stopped and looked around the table.

'It was the smell that I noticed first. I looked up and turned my head. My bag was lying on a lion's back. The horse was dead and half-eaten on the ground behind him.'

'What happened next?' I asked. I recognized this as a real African story.

'I shot the lion in the head,' he said. 'But before he died he took a part of me.' And he held up his left hand which had only two fingers on it.

'That horse had been dead for an hour,' he continued. 'And the lion was watching me all the time. He was a brown shape near the tree. I had seen the shape and colour but I had not looked carefully. That was my mistake, gentlemen, and we have made the same mistake tonight.'

Sir Walter agreed.

'This Black Stone fellow,' the General said, 'is he a German spy or something? No one could keep all these facts and figures in his head. It doesn't seem very important to me.'

'Oh, yes, he could,' the Frenchman replied. 'A good spy can remember everything. His eyes are like a camera. Did you notice that he didn't speak at all? He read the papers several times but didn't say anything. You can be sure that he has all the facts now. When I was young, I could do the same thing.'

'Well, we must change the plans,' Sir Walter said.

Mr. Whittaker looked surprised. 'Did you say that to Lord Alloa?' he asked.

'No.'

'Of course we can't decide it now. But I'm almost certain about this: if we change the plans, we'll have to change the coast of England too!'

'And there's another problem,' Royer said. 'I've told you some of the French plans, and that German spy heard them. Now we can't possibly change our plans. But we can do this, gentlemen: we can catch that man and his friends before they leave the country.'

'But how?' I cried. 'We don't know anything about them.'

'And there's the post,' Whittaker said. 'They can easily send the facts to Germany by post. They may be on their way now. We can't possibly search the post.'

'No,' the Frenchman said. 'You don't know how a good spy works, gentlemen. He delivers the secrets himself. The Germans will pay the man who brings the plans. So we still have a chance. The fellow must cross the sea to get to Germany, and we must search all ships. Believe me, gentlemen. This matter is very important for both France and Britain.'

Royer was clearly a wise man, and he had the right ideas. But where could we find these German spies? The problem was a very difficult one.

Then suddenly I remembered Scudder's book.

'Sir Walter,' I cried, 'did you bring Scudder's note-book from the cottage? I've just remembered something in it.'

He nodded and went to a cupboard. And a few moments later I had found the page. 'Thirty-nine steps,' I read. 'Thirty-nine steps - I counted them. High tide is at seventeen minutes past ten.'

Whittaker was looking at me. 'What does all that mean?' he asked.

'Scudder knew these spies,' I said. 'And he knew the place where they lived. They're probably leaving the country tomorrow. And I believe that we'll find them near the sea. There are steps at this place, and it has a high tide at seventeen minutes past ten.'

'But they could leave tonight,' someone said. 'They needn't wait until tomorrow.'

'I don't think so. They have their own secret way and they're not going to hurry. They're Germans, aren't they? And Germans always like to follow a plan. Now where can we find a book of tides?'

'Well, it's a chance,' Whittaker said, 'and it may be our only chance to catch them.'

'Isn't there a book of tides at the Admiralty?' Sir Walter asked.

'Yes, of course,' Whittaker replied. 'We'd better go there immediately.'

We went out into the hall, and the butler gave their coats to the gentlemen. We got into two of the motor-cars, but Sir Walter did not come with us.

'I'm going to Scotland Yard,' he said. 'We'll probably need some of MacGillivray's men.'

We reached the Admiralty and followed Whittaker through several empty rooms to the

map-room. There he found a book of tides and gave it to me. I sat down at a desk and the others stood around me.

But the job was too difficult for any of us. There were hundreds of names in the book. And high tide was at seventeen minutes past ten in forty or fifty places.

I put down the book and began to think about the steps.

'We're looking for a place,' I said., 'which probably has several sets of steps. But the important set has thirty-nine steps in it.'

'And the tide is important too,' Royer said. 'So that means that it's probably a small harbour. These fellows won't try to escape in a big boat. They may have a yacht or a fishing-boat.'

'That's quite possible,' I said. 'The place may not be a harbour at all. These spies have been in London, and now they want to go to Germany. So they'll probably leave from a place on the East Coast.'

I picked up a piece of paper and wrote down our ideas.

(1) The place has several sets of steps or stairs. The important set has thirty-nine steps.

(2) High tide is at seventeen minutes past ten, and the tide may be necessary for boats to leave.

(3) The place has a small harbour or it may be a piece of open coast.

(4) The Germans may use a yacht or a fishing-boat.

Then I guessed three things and wrote them down:

(1) The steps may not be a part of the harbour.

(2) It is a quiet place.

(3) It is on the East Coast between Cromer and Dover.

We have to look for a foreign yacht.

Sir Walter came into the room with MacGillivray behind him.

'The police are watching the harbours and railway stations,' MacGillivray said. 'But it's not going to be easy for them. They're looking for a fat man, a thin man and an old man!'

I showed my paper to Sir Walter and said, 'These are our ideas. But we'll need someone to help us.' I turned to Whittaker and said, 'Is there a Chief Coastguard on the East Coast?'

'I don't know. But we have an Inspector of Coastguards in London. He lives in Clapham and he knows the East Coast very well.'

'Can you bring him here tonight?' I asked.

'Yes, I think so. I'll go to his house.'

It was very late when Whittaker returned with the Inspector. He was a fine old fellow and very polite to the officers. Sir Arthur Drew spoke to him first.

'We're looking for a place on the East Coast,' he said, 'where there are several sets of steps. They probably lead down to the beach. Do you know any place like that?'

'Well, sir, I don't know. There's Brattlesham in Norfolk of course. There are steps there, but only the fishermen use them.'

That isn't the place,' I said.

Then there are plenty of holiday places. They usually have a few steps.'

'No. This is probably a very quiet place.'

'Then I'm sorry, gentlemen. I don't know. There's only the Ruff...'

'What's that?' I asked.

'It's a bit of high ground on the Kent coast. Near Bradgate. There are some fine houses on the top and some of them have stairs down to the beach. They're private beaches of course.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'Well, the people who own the houses also own the beaches, sir. When you buy a house there, you get a piece of private beach as well.'

I picked up the book of tides and found Bradgate. High tide there was at twenty-seven minutes past ten on June 15th.

'How can I find the time of high tide at the Ruff?' I asked the Inspector.

'Oh, I know that, sir. I stayed there once in June. It's ten minutes before high tide at Bradgate.'

I shut the book and looked around.

'Sir Walter.' I said, 'can I borrow your car and a map of the roads in Kent? I'd like to have some of your men too, MacGillivray. We may be able to surprise these German gentlemen tomorrow morning.'

They did not answer me for a moment. I did not work for the Foreign Office or the Admiralty, and I was not in the British Army. But I was young and strong and I had met these spies before.

It was Royer who spoke first. 'I'm quite happy,' he said, 'to leave this matter in Mr. Hannay's hands.'

'Yes, yes,' Sir Walter said, 'I think so too.' And he nodded at MacGillivray.

Half an hour later I was driving quickly through the villages of Kent. MacGillivray's best officer was sitting beside me in the car. It was half past three in the morning.

CHAPTER 10: THE HOUSE BY THE SEA

We stayed at the Griffin Hotel in Bradgate. At seven o'clock in the morning I was looking out of a window there. It was a beautiful day.

A man was fishing down at the harbour, and I remembered Royer's story about the lion.

A small warship had just arrived and was lying south of the harbour. I called MacGillivray's man.

'Inspector Scaife,' I said, 'do you know that ship? Perhaps Whittaker sent her here.'

'I don't think so,' he said. 'She's usually along this part of the coast.' And he told me her name and the name of her captain. I went to the telephone and sent a telegram to Sir Walter about them.

After breakfast Scaife and I walked along the beach. We went towards the stairs on the Ruff but stopped half a mile from them.

'I won't come all the way with you,' I said. 'These fellows know me very well. I'll wait here. You go on and count all the steps.'

I sat down behind a rock and waited. There was no one on the beach. It was ten o'clock when Scaife came back.

'There are six sets of stairs,' he said, 'and they lead to six different houses.' He took a piece of paper from his pocket and read: 'Thirty-four, thirty-five, thirty-nine, forty-two, forty-seven and twenty-one.'

I felt so pleased that I almost got up and shouted.

We hurried back to Bradgate and sent a telegram to MacGillivray. I wanted six good men, and they had to stay at different hotels in the town.

'Now go back to the thirty-nine steps,' I said to Scaife, and have a look at the house. Then go to the post-office and find out who lives there.'

He brought back some strange but interesting facts. The house was called Trafalgar Lodge and belonged to an old gentleman named Appleton. Mr. Appleton often stayed there in the summer. He had arrived about a week before and was still there. No one knew a lot about him but he seemed kind and quiet. Scaife had made some excuse to visit the house and noticed three women there.

'They look after the place,' he said, 'and they can't possibly be Germans. They talk too much for that.'

'Did you notice the houses on each side of Trafalgar Lodge?' I asked.

'Yes. The house on the right is empty. They're still building the place on the left.' Before dinner I walked along the Ruff myself and I took Scaife's telescope. I found a quiet place away from the houses and sat down there. I could see the house very well through the telescope. It was a red stone place with large windows. There was a garden all around the house, and the British flag was flying there from a tall post! While I was watching, a man left the house to walk along the hill-top. He was an old man wearing white trousers and a blue coat. He was also carrying a telescope, and he had a newspaper under his arm. He walked about two hundred yards and then sat down on a seat to read the paper. A few minutes later he put down the paper and looked at the warship through the telescope. And he looked at it for a long time. I watched him for half an hour, and then he got up to return to the house. I went back to my hotel.

I was not very happy about that old man. He did not look like a spy, but he could be the old fellow from that Scottish farm.

In the afternoon an exciting thing happened. A yacht came up from the south and lay near the Ruff. She was about a hundred and fifty tons and she flew the British flag. Scaife and I went down to the harbour and spoke to the coastguard there. We said that we wanted to go fishing. So the coastguard got a boat for us, and we sailed out of the harbour.

We caught about twenty pounds of fish that afternoon. And about four o'clock we sailed quite close to the yacht. She looked like a wonderful white bird on the water. 'She's a fast boat,' Scaife said. 'If anyone wants to get away quickly, they'll go in this ship. There's plenty of power in those engines.'

Her name was the Ariadne. We spoke to a few men on her, and they were clearly Englishmen. Then an officer appeared, and the men stopped talking. The officer was a young man with a bright clean face and he spoke English very well. But we were quite certain that he was not an Englishman. His hair was cut very short and his clothes looked quite foreign.

In the evening I met the captain of the warship at the hotel.

'We may need your ship tonight or tomorrow,' I said. 'Have you heard anything about it?'

'Yes, sir. I've had a message from the Admiralty. I'll come in close when it's dark. I know what to do.'

About an hour later I walked back along the hill-top towards Trafalgar Lodge. The old man and a young man were playing tennis in the garden. While I was watching them, a woman brought out bottles and glasses. The young man who was rather fat took the things from her.

'Those fellows seem all right,' I said to myself. 'They're quite different from those terrible men in Scotland. I've probably made a mistake.'

Then another man arrived at the house on a bicycle. He was thin, dark and quite young. They finished the game of tennis and they all went into the house.

I walked slowly back to the hotel. Was I wrong about those men? Were they acting while I was watching them? They did not know that anyone was watching them. And they behaved like any Englishmen.

But there were three men in that house: the old man, the fat one and the thin, dark fellow. The house agreed completely with Scudder's notes. A yacht was lying half a mile away and she had a foreign officer. I thought about Karolides and the danger of war. And I remembered the fear in Sir Arthur Drew's face.

I knew what I had to do. I had to go to that house and arrest those men. If I was

wrong, I would take the blame myself. But I did not like the job at all.

Suddenly I remembered my friend Peter Pienaar in Rhodesia. I have already written something about him. Well, Peter had been a criminal before he became a policeman. In fact the police accepted him for that reason. He knew all the worst criminals in the country. Peter told me that he had once escaped very easily from the police. He had put on a black coat and gone to church. And he had chosen to sit next to a police officer. They had sung together and used the same book. And Peter had not been recognized!

I asked him why the policeman had not recognized him. And Peter replied, 'Because the place and my clothes were different. He would have known me if I had been in the street or at a hotel. He would have recognized me if I had been wearing my usual clothes. But he did not believe that I would go to church or wear a long black coat.' These thoughts made me quite sure again. Our German enemies were as wise as Peter. They lived in an English house, and the British flag was flying in the garden. They used English names and played English games. Their private life was completely English, and so no one was suspicious of them.

It was now eight o'clock in the evening. I met Scaife at the hotel and gave him his orders.

'Put two men in the garden,' I said, 'and hide three others close to the windows. When I want you, I'll call.'

I was not hungry, so I went for a walk. I noticed the lights on the Ariadne and on the warship. I sat down on a seat and waited for more than an hour.

At half past nine I went to Trafalgar Lodge. Scaife's men were in their places by now, but I did not see anyone. There were lights in the house and the windows were open. I rang the door-bell.

One of the women opened the door.

'May I speak to Mr. Appleton?' I asked.

'Yes, sir. Please come in,' she said.

I had made a plan. I hoped to walk straight into the house and see those three German faces at once. They would recognize me immediately, and it would show on their faces.

But when I was inside, I could not move. I noticed their hats and coats and walking-sticks. There was a large clock in the corner of the hall. English pictures were hanging on the walls, and the place was like ten thousand other English homes.

'Your name, sir?' the woman asked.

'Hannay. Richard Hannay.'

She went into a room and called my name. I followed her immediately but I was too late. The three men had had a moment to hide their surprise.

The old man was standing up, and he and the fat one were wearing dinner-suits. The other man had on a suit of blue cloth.

'Mr. Hannay?' the old man said. 'You wish to speak to me, I believe. Excuse me, you fellows. Come into the next room, Mr. Hannay.'

I pulled a chair towards me and sat down on it.

'We've met before,' I said, 'and you know my business.'

The light was not very bright in the room. But I noticed that they all looked surprised.

'Perhaps we have,' the old man said, 'but I can't remember. I'm sorry that I don't know your business, sir. Will you please tell me?'

I thought about Peter Pienaar and said, 'This is the end, gentlemen. I've come to arrest you all.'

'Arrest us!' the old man said. 'But why?'

'I arrest you for the murder of Franklin Scudder in London on May 23rd.'

'I've never heard that name before,' the old man said, and his voice seemed very weak.

The fat man spoke then. 'I read about that in the papers. But this is terrible. We don't know anything about the murder, sir. Where do you come from?'

'Scotland Yard,' I said.

They said nothing when they heard that. The old man looked down at his feet and seemed very nervous.

Then the fat man said, 'This must be a mistake, uncle. These things do happen sometimes. But we can easily prove the truth. I wasn't even in England on May 23rd, and you were ill, weren't you, Bob? You were in London, uncle, I know, but you can explain your business there.'

'That's right, Percy! Now what did I do on May 23rd? Oh, I remember. I came up in the morning from Woking and had dinner with Charlie Symons. I was at Grantham House in the afternoon, wasn't I? Yes, that's right. And I stayed there all the evening.' The fat fellow looked at me. 'I'm afraid you've made a mistake, sir. We'll help you if we can of course. But sometimes Scotland Yard is wrong.'

'Yes, indeed,' the old man said. 'We'll do anything to help you, sir, but this is clearly a mistake.'

'Won't Nellie laugh when she hears about this!' one of them said.

'Oh, she will! I must tell Charlie about it too. Now Mr. Hannay, I'm not angry with you, but you've come to the wrong place.'

They could not be acting. I felt sure that it was all true. I had made a mistake. And I wanted to say, 'I'm sorry, gentlemen,' and leave the house.

But the old man was very bald. The fat fellow was there too, and the third man was dark and thin. I looked at them carefully and I looked around the room. Everything was all right. I could not see one suspicious thing in that room. And I did not recognize their faces.

'Don't you agree, sir?' the old man asked me. 'Haven't you come to the wrong house?'

'No. This is the right house.'

'Well, it's a great waste of time,' the thin fellow said. 'Are you going to take us to the police station? You're only doing your duty, I know, but it's very difficult.'

I did not answer him. I thought, 'Oh, Peter Pienaar, help me!'

The fat man stood up. 'Perhaps Mr. Hannay needs more time,' he said. 'It isn't an easy problem for him. Let's play bridge for half an hour, shall we? Do you play, sir?'

'Yes. I've plenty of time and I like a game of bridge.'

We went into the next room, and I looked around. Books and newspapers were lying about. The tennis things were in an open cupboard in the corner. The old man's telescope was on top of the cupboard.

We sat around a card-table in the middle of the room. And the dark fellow brought me a drink. I played with him against the other two.

It was like a dream. The windows were open, and I could see the moonlight on the sea. The three men were not afraid at all. They were talking and laughing together. But my heart was beating very quickly.

I did not play very well that night. My thoughts were too ugly for me to follow the cards. I had doubts about these men, and they knew it of course. I looked at their faces again and again but could not recognize them. They did not only appear different. I felt sure that they were different. 'Oh, Peter,' I thought once more.

Then suddenly I noticed something. The old man had put down his cards to drink some wine. And he did not pick them up for a moment. He sat back in his chair and

began to rub his right ear.

I immediately remembered that Scottish farm. I was standing in front of him there again. I had just finished telling him my story. And he had sat back and rubbed his ear. It was only a little thing, but I remembered it clearly.

The clouds lifted from my eyes and everything was bright again. I recognized the three men at once. Their faces changed suddenly and I knew all their secrets. It was the dark fellow who had killed Scudder. I was still playing bridge with him, but his eyes looked cold and cruel now. The fat man had changed too. He did not have one face but a hundred faces. And he had probably been Lord Alloa of the night before.

But the old man was clearly the chief criminal. He was as hard as a rock and quite without fear. I remembered Scudder's words: 'If you see his eyes, Hannay, you'll never forget them.' And it was true. I should never forget them.

We continued to play, but my heart was full of hate. When the dark man spoke to me, I could not answer him.

'Bob! Look at the clock,' the old man said. 'You'll miss your train if we don't hurry.' He turned to me. 'Bob has to go back to London tonight.' The voice was now as completely false as their faces.

'I'm sorry,' I said, 'but he isn't going tonight.'

'Why not?' the young man asked. 'I must go. I'll give you my address.'

'No. You must stay here.'

That probably made them nervous. They had tried to deceive me, but the trick had failed. They had only one chance now, and the old man took it.

'Well, arrest me, Mr. Hannay, and let my nephew go. Will that be all right?'

I shouted, 'Scaife!'

The lights went out immediately. Strong arms held me, and I could not move.

'Schnell, Franz,' a voice cried, 'das Boot, das Boot!' (1)

I looked out of the window. Two police officers were running across the garden. The dark fellow had jumped through the window and was running towards the steps.

Suddenly the room filled with people, and I was free. I caught the old man and held him. Scaife and another policeman fell upon the fat one. The lights came on.

We looked out of the window again. Franz reached the steps before the policemen. He opened the gate which locked itself behind him. And the policemen could not follow. We waited for a few minutes.

Suddenly the old man broke away from me. He rushed to the wall of the room and pressed a small button. A great noise rose up from below the house. The steps flew into the air in a cloud of dust.

'Dynamite!' I cried. 'They've destroyed the stairs!'

The old man was looking at me and laughing. A terrible light burned in his eyes.

'He is safe,' he shouted. 'You cannot follow him. He is gone ... He has won ... Der Schwarzestein ist in der Siegeskrone.' (2)

Two police officers caught the old fellow by the arms, and I said my last words to him. 'Franz hasn't won anything. He'll reach the Ariadne quite safely, I'm sure. But the boat has been in our hands for the last hour.'

Seven weeks later in August 1914, as all the world knows, we went to war. I joined the New Army at once, and because my experience in South Africa, was made an officer. But I had done my best service, I think, before the war began.

(1) German for "Quickly, Franz, the boat.. the boat!".

(2) German for "The Black Stone has won the victory".