



THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS

I had only been back in England for three months, and already I was bored and fed up. The weather was miserable, I couldn't get enough exercise in London, and most of the people I met were dull. I decided that if things didn't get better soon, I would go back to my old job as a mining engineer in South Africa. I had made enough money to give up work, but I realised I was not suited to a life of idleness.

That evening I had gone to a music-hall, but it was a silly show and I did not stay long. I got home to my flat – it was in a new block near Portland Place – and was just fitting my key into the door when a man came towards me. I remembered I had seen him before – he lived in one of the flats on the floor above. He was slim, with a short brown beard and small, piercing blue eyes.

'Richard Hannay?' he asked. 'Can I speak to you? May I come in for a minute?'