Acting Edition

The 39 Steps, Even More Abridged

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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The 39 Steps, Even More Abridged

Adapted by
Patrick Barlow

From the novel by
John Buchan

From the movie by Alfred Hitchcock

Licensed by ITV Global Entertainment Limited

And an original concept by
Simon Corble and Nobby Dimon

SAMUEL FRENCH

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ISBN 978-0-573-70957-9

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This sheet may be downloaded from: www.hse.gov.uk.

CHARACTERS

RICHARD HANNAY
COMPERE
MR MEMORY
ANNABELLA SCHMIDT
BUSINESS MAN 1
BUSINESS MAN 2
POLICEMAN 1
POLICEMAN 2
PAMELA EDWARDS
LOUISA JORDAN
PROFESSOR JORDAN
SHERIFF
INSPECTOR
LITTLE VOICE
VOICES
DUNWOODY
MR MCQUARRIE
HEAVY 1
HEAVY 2
MRS MCGARRIGLE
MR MCGARRIGLE
SUPERINTENDANT ALBRIGHT

SETTING

London, Edinburgh and the Scottish Highlands

TIME

1935

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The 39 Steps, Even More Abridged is the 40-minute (approx) version of my play *The 39 Steps*.

It is written for four actors: three men and a woman.

HANNAY is played by one man throughout.

The woman plays **ANNABELLA** and **PAMELA**.

The other two actors we call the **TWO MEN** play all other parts. They can be played by two men, two women or a man and a woman.

NB It is possible (and I have seen it done) – to cast the play with a company of at least fifty. Rather more expensive but jolly good fun.

STYLE OF PLAYING

This is not a naturalistic play.

That should be born in mind throughout. It should be played in the rapid, clipped and heightened style of 1930s thrillers.

SPEED and CLARITY are of the essence.

There should be no pauses in the dialogue apart from when it says *PAUSE* ie those moments of the most essential *DRAMATIC* nature.

'The Professor raises his little finger. 'Are you sure it wasn't – PAUSE – this one?!'

This is essential.

Finally, the more the audience is several steps behind the better.

Do not wait for them.

They'll catch up.

They'll thank you for it.

HANNAY. *(Voice.)* What are the Thirty-Nine Steps? What are the Thirty-Nine Steps? *What are the Thirty-Nine –*

MUSIC: ["MR MEMORY THEME"]

(Lights up on:)

OVERTURE

(The company run on. Furiously pull on the set for Scene One. They bow and exit. [NB Perhaps funnier if it is just the **TWO MEN** *who do all scene-shifting].)*

Music Hall. Night.

MUSIC: ["MR MEMORY THEME"]

*(***COMPERE** *and* **MR MEMORY** *enter. Bow.)*

(Sound effects: Applause.)

COMPERE. Good evenin' ladies and gentlemen and welcome to tonight's performance. And to begin our show tonight, please welcome one of the most remarkable men in the whole world. The astounding and amazing Mr Memory!!!

(Sound effects: Applause.)

The man with a million facts at his fingertips. With more facts in his brain than is possible to conceive! Is there nothing he does not know? Come on folks – let's find out! Are you ready for the questions Mr Memory?

MR MEMORY. Quite ready for the questions, thankoo!

(Sound effects: Applause.)

MUSIC: ["DRUMROLL"]

COMPERE. So first question please ladies and gents.

(Points round audience.)

Beg pardon sir? What was that? Who won the Cup in 1926 Mr Memory?

MR MEMORY. Who won the Cup in 1926? The Tottenham Hotspurs won the Cup in 1926, defeating the Arsenal Gunners by five goals to nil. Am I right sir?

COMPERE. Quite right, Mr Memory!!

(Sound effects: Applause.)

COMPERE. Ah yes! Here's another!

(Points into audience.)

Thank you madam. What was Napoleon's 'orse called?

MR MEMORY. Napoleon's 'orse was called Bellerephon. What he rode at the Battle of Waterloo sufferin severely from the 'aemorroids on June 18th 1815. Am I right madam?

(Sound effects: Applause.)

COMPERE. Very good Mr Memory! And now ladies and –

*(***RICHARD HANNAY** *appears in the box.)*

Ah! Here's a gentleman with a question. Your question sir please?

HANNAY. My what?

COMPERE. I'd say you was a military gentleman am I right sir?

HANNAY. Um – I was yes.

COMPERE. I thought that from your proud bearin sir. Good for you sir. Done his bit for king and country I should wager! A big round of applause please for the brave soldier ladies and gents!

(Sound effects: Applause.)

Who, with his brave comrades, set forth to make the world a better place. A new world! A better world! Give us 'ope for mankind and for the future!

HANNAY. Sadly not. Didn't make the world a better place. Didn't set forth to do anything! Did what I was told and didn't talk back. That's all. Nothing's changed.

The world as bad as it always was! Little hope in anything I'm afraid. Sorry to disappoint.

(Sound effects: Applause peters out.)

COMPERE. Ah well, ne'er mind sir! Have a nice night in the theatre why don't you? Might as well sir.

HANNAY. Might as well? Might as well just –

(Mimes blowing brains out.)

COMPERE. Oh come on sir! Chin up! How about a question for Mr Memory while you're 'ere sir?

HANNAY. I don't have a question for Mr Memory! Or Mr anybody! No questions left I'm afraid. Sorry. Goodnight.

*(***HANNAY** *turns. Bumps straight into* **ANNABELLA SCHMIDT**, *elegant in black.)*

ANNABELLA. Excuse me.

HANNAY. Oh – um –

ANNABELLA. Is this seat taken?

HANNAY. Er –

ANNABELLA. Thank you.

(She sits. **HANNAY** *gazes transfixed.)*

COMPERE. Right. Another question please? Anything at all? Geographical? Historical? Scientifical?

ANNABELLA. *(Looks into audience.)* Sheisse!

(She pulls out a gun. Fires. **MR MEMORY** *and* **COMPERE** *go into shock.)*

(Sound effects: Audience pandemonium.)

Excuse me?

HANNAY. Yes?

ANNABELLA. May I come home with you?

HANNAY. What?

COMPERE. That was Mr Memory!

(Sound effects: Applause.)

ANNABELLA. *PLEASE! You have to!*

HANNAY. Well – um – it's a little tricky at the moment. I've got the – er – decorators in and um –

(She runs out. He follows.)

Well, it's your funeral!

COMPERE. Thank you Mr Memory.

(*Applause.)*

(Shoves him off. Shouts into pit.)

Play man, play!!

MUSIC: ["MR MEMORY THEME"]

Don't forget his name now!

MR MEMORY. *(Runs back.)* Mr Memory!

COMPERE. Quite right Mr Memory! Thankoo!

MR MEMORY. Thankoo!

*(***MR MEMORY** *bows.* **COMPERE** *shoves him off. Bows. Exits.)*

(Applause/ Music: Ends.)

Hannay's Appartment. Night.

(A table with a phone, covered in a dust sheet. A window with a blind. **HANNAY** *and* **ANNABELLA** *enter. She opens the door, looks out, closes door.)*

ANNABELLA. Thank you Mr Hannay!

HANNAY. How do you know my name?

ANNABELLA. I saw it in the lobby. Richard Hannay. Portland Mansions, Portland Place.

HANNAY. Ah yes.

(Sound effects: Telephone rings.)

Hello there's the telephone.

ANNABELLA. *Don't answer it please!!!*

HANNAY. Why not?

ANNABELLA. Because I think it is for me.

*(***HANNAY** *pulls off dust sheet, picks up phone. It keeps ringing. He slams it down. It rings again. He slams it down again. It stops. Awkward moment.)*

HANNAY. So – may I know your name?

ANNABELLA. You don't want to know my name. Schmidt. Annabella Schmidt.

HANNAY. Well Annabella Schmidt, you fired that shot in the theatre didn't you? It wasn't a great show but it wasn't that bad.

ANNABELLA. It was a diversion. There were two men in the theatre trying to shoot me.

HANNAY. Beautiful mysterious woman pursued by gunmen. Sounds like a spy story.

ANNABELLA. That's exactly what it is. Only I prefer the word "agent" better.

HANNAY. "Secret agent" I suppose? For which country?

ANNABELLA. I have no country.

HANNAY. Born in a balloon, eh?

ANNABELLA. Now listen very carefully Mr Hannay! I am being pursued by a very brilliant secret agent of a certain foreign power who is on the point of obtaining highly confidential information *VITAL* to your air defence. I tracked two of his men to that Music Hall. Unfortunately they recognised me. They are in the street this moment. Beneath your English lamp post.

*(***HANNAY** *lifts the blind.* **TWO MEN** *run on in trilbies and trench coats. They carry a street lamp. They pose beneath it in film noir mode. Run off again with the lamp.)*

Now do you believe me?

*(***HANNAY** *lifts blind to be sure. The men run on again with the lamp.)*

HANNAY. Alright. You win!

(The men run off with the lamp.)

ANNABELLA. Mr Hannay, I am going to tell you something now which is not very healthy. It will mean either life. Or death. But if I tell you then you are – inwolved.

HANNAY. In what?

ANNABELLA. Inwolved.

*(***HANNAY** *lifts the blind. The* **TWO MEN**, *not expecting this, rush on again with the lamp.* **HANNAY** *turns.)*

HANNAY. Alright!! Tell me!!!

(The men gasp exhaustedly. Run off again with the lamp.)

ANNABELLA. Have you heard of the Thirty-Nine Steps?

HANNAY. What's that, a pub?

ANNABELLA. Enough of your English humour Mr Hannay please! All I can tell you is if these men are not stopped, it is only of matter of days, perhaps hours before the top secret and highly confidential information is out of the country. And when they've got it out of the country – God help us all! God help the world!!

HANNAY. The world!!?

ANNABELLA. Yes Richard! And now we are the only people who can stop them! You don't know what they're like my friend! How clever their chief is! He has a dozen names! A hundred faces! He can look like a thousand people! But one thing he cannot disguise. This part of his little finger –

(She lifts his little finger, links her little finger into his little finger.)

– is missing. So if ever you should meet a man with no top joint here – be very careful my friend.

HANNAY. I'll remember that.

ANNABELLA. *(Gazing into his eyes.)* Richard?

HANNAY. *(Gazing into hers.)* Yes?

ANNABELLA. Do you –

HANNAY. Do I –

ANNABELLA. – have a map?

HANNAY. A map?

ANNABELLA. A map of Scotland.

HANNAY. Map of Scotland?

ANNABELLA. I just said that.

HANNAY. There's a detailed map of Scotland in my room. Under the section – "Scotland."

ANNABELLA. There is a man in Scotland I must visit if anything is to be done. An Englishman. Professor Jordan. He lives at a place called – Alt-na-Shell-achhhhh.

HANNAY. I beg your pardon?

ANNABELLA. Alt-na-Shell-achhhhhhhh!

HANNAY. Alt-na-Shell-achhhhhh!? And the Thirty-Nine –

ANNABELLA. Good night… Richard.

(She disappears into the darkness. **HANNAY** *gazes after her entranced.)*

HANNAY. Goodnight… Annabella.

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