

The Thirty-Nine Steps: Chapter 1 - Reading Worksheet

Adapted from CHAPTER ONE: THE MAN WHO DIED

London, 10 P.M, May 14, 1914. Richard Hannay has recently arrived in London from South Africa. A mysterious neighbour calls on Hannay, saying that his life is in danger.

The little man drank more whisky. "I thought I was safe here in London," he said. "Then I saw two men standing in the street outside this building. I recognised one of them."

"What did you do?" I asked.

"I watched them from my window," said Scudder. "The man I recognised came in. He spoke to the porter."

"About what?"

"I don't know. But I think he is here to kill me. That's why I need you to hide me."

He sat there, blinking like an owl. I was starting to like the little chap. I trusted him.

"You can stay here for the night," I said. "I'll lock you in this room. But I warn you, Mr Scudder. Don't try any tricks. I have a gun - and I'm prepared to use it!"

For two days Scudder stayed in my back room. He read books and wrote a lot in his notebook. In the evening we played chess. He beat me easily.

On the third day, he began to get nervous again. In his notebook he wrote a list of the days until June 15th. He ticked off each day with a red pencil, making notes beside each one.

That evening I went out to dinner with a business contact. I came back about half-past ten for our chess game.

I had a cigar in my mouth as I pushed open the back room door. The light was off. Had Scudder already gone to bed?

I switched on the light. At first the room seemed empty. Then I saw something in the far corner which made me drop my cigar.

My guest was lying on his back. There was a long knife through his heart.



Quick Check: True or False?

1. Richard Hannay is in danger.
2. Hannay does not trust Scudder
3. Scudder knew the men standing in the street.
4. Hannay has a gun.
5. Hannay and Scudder play chess.
6. Scudder goes out for the evening.
7. Hannay finds Scudder dead.

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