

9. The Challenge of the *Mirror*

1. pages 143–146. **Houdini closely examined . . . some of the committeemen helped Houdini off the stage.** This account has been culled from a great number of sources, among them: Blackburn *Weekly Telegraph*, October 25, 1902, *Daily Star*, November 25, 1902, clippings in Houdini scrapbooks cited in Silverman notes, deposited at the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin; “The Handcuff King” in *Weekly Standard Express*, October 25, 1902, clipping in Houdini scrapbook in the collection of Byron Walker. Houdini himself reproduced this article in his various pitch books but misidentified the newspaper as the *Star*. For a comprehensive account of the whole Hodgson challenge see Brian Lead and Roger Woods, *Houdini the Mythmaker: The Unmasking of Harry Houdini* (United Kingdom, published by the authors, 1987).

2. page 146. **“I noticed on Houdini’s arms several scars . . .”** *The Halifax Evening Courier*, November 2, 1904. Cited in Silverman notes, deposited at the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

3. pages 146–147. **“Harry’s success had inspired a hord[e] . . . escape business.”** “Houdini as His Brother Saw Him” by Hardeen, *The Sphinx*, October 1936, 214.

4. page 147. **“fully patented”** . . . This comes from Houdini’s advertisement headlined “Stop Thief!” It appeared in at least one newspaper (*The Era*) and he also ran it in *Mahatma*, Vol. 4, October 1900, 411.

5. page 147. **patent application as “Abandoned.”** According to Silverman’s notes deposited at the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin, Houdini took out patent application #14327 protecting his act on August 8, 1900. The patent was never granted, the application becoming “void” or “abandoned”. See *Specifications of Inventions . . . 1900* (London, 1902), Leaf 2.

6. page 147. **“I believe you would rather scrap than eat.”** Chung Ling Soo (William Robinson) to Houdini in a letter from October 9, 1901, in the collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

7. page 147. **“harum-scarum . . . fight like a wildcat.”** See “My Pal Dash” by Joe Hayman, *The New Conjurors’ Magazine*, July 1, 1945, 28.

8. page 147. **“If you are in a fight hit the other guy first.”** Correspondence between Major Samuel White and Kenneth Silverman, July 24, 1993, Silverman notes deposited at the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

9. page 147. **“Come over. The apples are ripe.”** “Houdini as His Brother Saw Him” by Hardeen, *The Sphinx*, October 1936, 214.

10. page 147. **“We were very quickly in strong . . .”** Ibid.

11. pages 147–148. **“Please accept my assurance . . .”** Letter from Albert Hill (Hilbert) to Hardeen, November 18, 1901, in the collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

12. page 148. **“very sore from the kicks I got . . .”** Undated letter from Hangeros to Houdini, in the collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

13. page 148. **Harry Rudini, Harry Blondini, or Harry Mourdini.** Houdini was plagued by those who traded on his act as well as his name. Some like the above used variations of Houdini while others actually called themselves Houdini. Mourdini and Rudini are mentioned by Houdini writing as Herr N. Osey in *Mahatma*, September 1901. Harry Blondini is known to us from a great image of him hanging in chains off a bridge. Houdini actually collected material about all of his imitators, including Hardeen, and made an enormous scrapbook. It is now in the collection of the New York Public Library.

14. page 148. **“first tried to ‘do’ him.”** Kolar has nothing but good things to say about Houdini in his column “Chats by Kolar” in *The Sphinx*, November 1926, 260. He confirmed that Houdini had “in his possession certain cuffs that he prepared for those escape artists he might care to stump . . .”

15. pages 148–150. **handcuff man named Kleppini . . . changed the combination.** The encounter with Kleppini and the story of the French letter cuffs is primarily from Houdini’s *Conjurers’ Monthly Magazine*, May 15, 1907, 302–305 and from several pages

of clippings and a letter from Kleppini in Houdini's Imitator scrapbook at the New York Public Library. Although there has been some debate as to the veracity of the story there is evidence that Houdini did use these French letter cuffs and perhaps even had them offered up as a challenge to him on one occasion. In the "Houdini The Jailbreaker" scrapbook in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin, there is a clipping from an unknown Halifax (UK) paper dated November 7, 1902. In part the story says "At the first performance Houdini was challenged with a pair of handcuffs which were not of the regulation type. However, he consented to tackle them, though this is against his usual custom. They were larger letter padlocks, joined together to form a pair of handcuffs, and it took Houdini seven minutes to escape, the magic word being a difficult one: 'Clef.'" This challenge happened a little more than four months after the Kleppini incident. Perhaps this was a case of Houdini offering his own cuffs for a challenge, or perhaps this was a real challenge, and Houdini used the word "Clef" expecting it to be the default setting. It's most likely that this is another example of Houdini creating the excitement of a challenge for himself.

These cuffs or locks of a similar type are most likely now in the collection of John Ernst, grandson of Houdini's lawyer, Bernard Ernst. A photo of a letter lock is in the first edition of Kellock's biography. At one point Frank B. Widmayer, a handcuff inventor from New York tried to buy them from Houdini. This information can be found in a letter from Widmayer to Houdini dated June 9, 1913 now in the collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. Also it's interesting that in an undated fragment of a letter from Alexander Weyer to Houdini, Weyer says "I see you can handle

the French cuffs as well as a pack of cards. Good boy.” This letter is also in the collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

16. page 150. **employed a machinist . . .** Kinsky’s relationship with Houdini and the terms of the challenge are spelled out in note from a Mr. Kieken, a town-clerk in Essen on July 10, 1902. Houdini appended a note to Kieken’s note that explains the animus between Kinsky and Houdini. This can be found in Houdini’s scrapbook of Police letters that is now in the collection of the New York Public Library.

17. page 150–151. **“Sometimes it was disgusting . . . higher extent”** *Allgemeine Beobachter Essen Ruhr* for July 11, 1902. This is cited by Silverman in his notes that were deposited in the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

18. page 151. **“He offered himself . . . I was his Master.”** Houdini’s scrapbook of Police letters that is now in the collection of the New York Public Library.

19. page 151. **“Will the gentleman who . . . this gentleman.”** From a Huddersfield newspaper dated December 10, 1902 cited by Silverman in his notes deposited at the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

20. page 151. **“Back to this wretched town . . .”** These quotes come from Houdini’s diary for the week of December 14, 1903. All diary citations are cited in Silverman’s

notes deposited at the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

21. page 152. **“I hear that Houdini having made his ‘pile’ . . .”** *Blackburn Standard and Weekly* for December 19, 1903, cited in Brian Lead and Roger Woods, *Houdini the Mythmaker: The Unmasking of Harry Houdini* (United Kingdom, published by the authors, 1987), 26.

22. page 152. **“Said Houdini would not . . .”** Houdini’s diary for December 28, 1903.

23. page 152. **Commander Charles Scott gave Houdini a glowing letter . . .** Scott’s letter to Houdini for January 19, 1904 is in Houdini’s scrapbook of Police letters in the collection of the New York Public Library. Scott is also mentioned by Melville in his diary which is in the collection of Andrew Cook. In correspondence with the authors, Cook identified Scott as “Commander Scott—a chief constable who attended one of a number of meetings held with chief constables in 1910/11 to secure their co-operation with newly reorganised SS bureau re German spies in England.”

24. page 152. **Houdini borrowed more than 131 pounds . . .** “Better Than Jack Sheppard”, *London Weekly Dispatch*, February 28, 1904.

25. page 152. **“House very poorly visited . . .”** Houdini’s diary for February 28, 1904.

26. page 152. **“I am directed . . .”** Letter from chief police clerk of the Old Jewery to Houdini for March 9, 1904, cited in Silverman’s notes deposited in the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.
27. pages 153–154. **“If there are any challengers in the house . . .”** The dramatic story of the *Mirror* challenge being offered is primarily from *The Daily Illustrated Mirror* March 14, 1904.
28. page 154. **“London in an uproar . . .”** Houdini’s diary for March 14, 1904.
29. pages 154–157. **Houdini was scheduled to perform at three P.M. . . . most important challenge of Houdini’s life.** The dramatic story of the escape itself primarily comes from *The Daily Illustrated Mirror*, March 18, 1904.
30. page 158. **“Mirror matinee. I defeat the Mirror . . .”** Houdini’s diary for March 17, 1904.
31. page 158. **“All English newspapers have . . .”** Houdini’s diary for March 18, 1904.
32. page 158. **“A Challenge to the World”** This challenge was proffered by Houdini in *The Daily Illustrated Mirror*, March 21, 1904.

33. page 158. **On March 28, a reed-thin . . .** *The Daily Illustrated Mirror*, March 28, 1904.
34. page 159. **Years after Houdini's victory, suspicions . . .** One of the prime culprits in suggesting a "fix" with the challenge was Houdini's good friend Will Goldston. What he wrote further obfuscated the real story because his suggestion was that Bess had passed the key to Houdini in a glass of water, a ridiculous theory. Will Goldston, *Sensational Tales of Mystery Men* (London: Goldston, 1929).
35. page 160. **Every item made of sterling silver . . .** See article by Jessie McNab, "Nineteenth-Century English Silver" in *Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000).
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/19es/hd_19es.htm (October 2004)
36. page 160. **"a beautiful solid silver model . . ."** From "Houdini's Great Victory," *The Daily Illustrated Mirror*, March 18, 1904.
37. page 161. **"Hungarian Cuffs" after their inventor . . ."** From "Why Be A Prisoner?" unidentified clipping in a Houdini scrapbook in the collection of Byron Walker.
38. page 161. **Back in 1902, in Essen, Germany . . .** From Will Goldston, *The Magician Annual*, 1909-1910, 16.

39. page 161–162. **“Having witnessed . . . are mistaken.”** Howill & Son letter to Houdini, Brighton Hippodrome, in Houdini’s Challenge scrapbook 1903–1913, in the collection of Sidney Radner, formally on loan to Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.
40. page 162. **A colonel in the military . . .** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 299.
41. page 162. **“First time I ever disappointed, . . .”** Houdini’s diary for April 10, 1904.
42. page 162. **“incredulous horror,” and “his . . . blow.”** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 299.
43. page 162. **“Raised hell because . . . sore for the night.”** Bernard C. Meyer, M.D., *Houdini—A Mind In Chains—A Psychoanalytical Portrait* (New York: Dutton, 1976), 56.
44. page 162. **On May 27, Houdini, Bess . . .** Houdini diary, May 28, 1904.
45. page 162. . . . **upgrade the three of them to first class . . .** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 173.

46. page 163. **Houdini also spurned Beck's offer of bookings . . .** "A Talk With Houdini" in the *Dramatic Mirror*, June 24, 1904.
47. page 163. **"the finest private house . . ."** From *The Sphinx*, August 15, 1904, 73.
48. page 163. **"Someday when I'm too old . . ."** From Milbourne Christopher, *Houdini: The Untold Story* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), 84.
49. page 163. **"Saw what was left . . ."** **"Nothing but . . ."** Houdini's diary for August 18, 1904.
50. page 163. **They visited old neighbors . . .** Houdini's diary for July 17–25, 1904.
51. page 163. **"We will arrive Tuesday morning . . ."** Houdini letter to Bess, 1904, letter in the collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.
52. page 163. **"She looks a treat in her pale . . ."** Houdini's diary for July 26, 1904.
53. page 165. **"You're a fraud; you're a damned . . ."** From "Rival Handcuff Kings" in *Western Mail* (Cardiff), April 11, 1905, cited in Silverman files deposited at the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.
54. page 166. **"Went to Empire . . ."** Houdini's diary for April 10, 1905.

55. page 166. **In September in Glasgow . . .** “Houdini At the Zoo,” *Glasgow Evening Times*, September 23, 1904.
56. page 166. **In December, Houdini sat in a box at the Empire Theatre . . .** Houdini diary, December 3, 1904.
57. page 166. **Back in Glasgow in January of 1905 . . .** Houdini diary, January 23, 1905.
58. page 166. **On February 18th, in Rochester . . .** Houdini’s diary for February 18, 1905.
59. page 167. **“I found out that the stage carpenter . . .”** William Robinson letter to Houdini, June 20, 1905, letter in the collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.
60. page 167. **Franz Kukol, and a man named Vickery . . .** From “Decent Exposure—Houdini Style!” in Edwin A. Dawes, *The Complete Rich Cabinet of Magical Curiosities*, CD-ROM, (Surrey, Peter Scarlett, 2005), p. 103.
61. page 169. **“I’ll wager that if you throw a stone . . .”** From “Notes From Houdini,” in the *Dramatic Mirror*, June 17, 1905.

62. page 169. **A large American eagle . . .** Houdini's column in the *Dramatic Mirror*, December 17, 1904.

63. page 169. **Houdini's last night in Leith . . .** Houdini's account is in his self-published pitchbook, *Life, History and Handcuff Secrets of Houdini*, c. 1908, 40.