

10. Leap of Faith

1. page 171–172. **“My next experiment will conclusively . . .”** This story shocked even the most avid Houdini aficionados. It is based on an eyewitness account in the *Boston Herald*, February 11, 1907, clipping in Houdini Pressbook, 1906–1911, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

Houdini would often make a display of his insensitivity to pain and his ability to control his blood flow by thrusting a needle through his cheek. In San Francisco of August 1907, he met with *Bulletin* reporter Pauline Jacobson. “I’m almost insensitive to pain,” Houdini told her. “As a boy when my father used to lick me,” grinned Houdini, “the harder he would lick the more I’d laugh. I can sew buttons on my bare chest. And shall I run a needle through my cheek for you?” I shivered. “I’d like to see you. But will it not hurt?” “Not at all,” bowed Houdini, as politely as if handing my glove; “it will give me pleasure.” And before I could remonstrate further, he made a quick fold of his cheek—ugh. “Now, you pull it out. Oh, but you must,” insisted Houdini. At once the needle was clear through the other side, a half inch. The second pull—my stomach careened like a ship under heavy sea. I turned my eyes. It came out. “Now shall I run the needle through my tongue for you?” smiled Houdini. I declined. I’m not from all parts of Missouri.”

From “How Houdini Made a Pin Cushion Of His Cheek”, *The Bulletin* (San Francisco), August 31, 1907, clipping in a Houdini scrapbook at the Library of Congress. Houdini learned these pain-resistance effects from two of the greatest “horses” around, Tommy Minnock and Billy Diamond. For a wonderful account of a backstage meeting of Houdini and Minnock see Joseph Rinn’s book, *Sixty Years of Psychological Research* (New York:

Truth Seeker Co., 1950), 123–126. Diamond reflects on his day as a “horse” when Houdini performed as the mesmerist “Professor Murat” in *The Sphinx*, August 1920, 179. Yet the appearance in Boston before an audience of select physicians and press was surely Houdini’s most dramatic display since he made his whole *face* into a pincushion. There is some confusion as to where this event took place. Some newspaper accounts place it in the Boston Athletic Association smoking room. Others call it the Boston Athletic Club. It seems likely that this was the same place, that is, the Club was the facility used by the Association.

2. page 172. **And what’s worse, he found that America . . . parasitic imitators.** For many examples of this see both the Houdini Imitator’s scrapbook in the collection of the New York Public Library and the Houdini Pressbook, 1906–1911, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

3. page 174. **In 1903, he dispatched “Doc,” his brother . . .** See “A War of Magicians” in *Springfield Republican*, February 23, 1903. The encounter was also reported in the *Dramatic Mirror*, February 28, 1903.

4. page 174. **In May of 1905, Houdini sent another brother . . .** For details of William’s contretemps with Cunning see “Theatre Riot After Failure of Performer,” *New York Evening Journal*, May 16, 1905, clipping in Houdini’s Imitators scrapbook in the collection of the New York Public Library, and “Jail Breaker Cunning Feared Rival’s

Shackles,” unidentified clipping on same page. There are additional details in Milbourne Christopher, *Houdini: The Untold Story* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), 92.

5. pages 174–175. **Houdini’s fall 1905 season unofficially opened . . .** “Cunning, the Handcuff Expert, Is Called Down at Brooklyn Theatre,” *New York Telegraph*, September 12, 1903, clipping in Houdini’s Imitator’s scrapbook, in the collection of the New York Public Library. For the insider’s perspective, see the detailed account by Joseph Dunninger in Dunninger and Walter Gibson, *Dunninger’s Secrets* (New Jersey: Lyle Stuart, Inc., 1974), 263–272.

6. page 175. **Mahatma, the Brooklyn-based magic magazine . . .** *Mahatma*, October 1905, 40.

7. pages 175–176. **At three P.M. on September 20, 1905, a small group . . .** The Houdini-Boudini “confrontation” was compiled from a variety of sources, including “Houdini Wins and is Handcuff King,” *The World*, September 21, 1905, clipping in Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University and in Houdini’s Imitators scrapbook in the collection of the New York Public Library. See also Milbourne Christopher, *Houdini: The Untold Story* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), 92–93.

8. page 176. **Chung Ling Soo sandbagged his rival Ching Ling Foo . . .** Account is in “Soo and Foo,” *The Dispatch*, London, January 8, 1905, clipping in the collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. Houdini was an advisor to his

friend Soo for their confrontation; it's possible that the Soo-Foo headlines prompted Houdini to create a Hou-Bou rivalry.

9. page 176. **“it is absolutely impossible for us to get . . .”** Letter from unidentified Keith's booker to Houdini, August 28, 1903, copy placed in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin by Kenneth Silverman.

10. page 176. **On January 1, 1906, he was handcuffed . . .** “Houdini Defies Sylvester” *The Washington Post*, January 2, 1906, 12.

11. page 177. **Houdini insisted on escaping from the heavily . . .** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 189–190.

12. page 177. **“What are you doing here . . .”** “Condemned Murderers Released by Houdini” *The Washington Post*, January 7, 1906, reproduced as broadside by Houdini and later reprinted in his pitch book *Adventurous Life of a Versatile Artist* (New York: C. E. Wight Co., 1922), 29. There is a Houdini-penned account of this jailbreak in “The Thrills in the Life of a Magician” *American Magazine*, September 1918, 36.

13. page 177. **“I let all your prisoners out . . .”** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 189–190.

14. page 177. **“That same day Houdini received an impressive certificate . . .”**
“Houdini Defies Sylvester” *The Washington Post*, January 2, 1906, 12.
15. page 177. **“. . . positively no chance for any confederacy . . .”** Ibid. The original is in the Houdini Police letters scrapbook in the collection of the New York Public Library.
16. pages 177–178. **“In order that defective means of . . .”** “Houdini Defies Sylvester”
The Washington Post, January 2, 1906, 12. The original is in the Houdini Police letters scrapbook in the collection of the New York Public Library.
17. page 179. **Much of what we now understand has come . . .** For an example of Steranko’s genius see “Steranko’s World of Escapes” *Genii*, October 1964, 64–110.
18. page 181. **In Boston in March, Houdini made a similar splash . . .** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 190–191. See also numerous Boston newspaper articles for March 20, 1906 in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University, including “Seen and Heard” in *The Boston Record*, March 20, 1906, which quotes Superintendent Pierce.
19. pages 181–182. **“Under the personal direction . . .”** “Police Mystified By Tricks in Jail,” unidentified clipping #51, November 17, 1906, clipping in Robinson Locke scrapbook 247 in the collection of the New York Public Library.

20. page 182. **Houdini would send Rohan spare parts of leg restraints . . .** Rohan letter to Houdini, April 10, 1907, in the collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

21. page 182. **by the spring of 1912, six years later . . .** The last record we've been able to find of Houdini doing a jail escape was In Trenton, New Jersey, on March 14, 1912. Several translations of the letter from Captain John Cleary can be found in Houdini's scrapbook of Police letters in the collection of the New York Public Library. This is the last letter in the scrapbook and we could find no other record of Houdini doing a jail escape after this one.

22. page 183. **Early in March he was challenged . . .** "Severest Test" *The Boston Globe*, March 10, 1906 clipping in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

23. page 184. **"I surrender . . . For years I have . . ."** "Severest Test" *The Boston Globe*, March 10, 1906 clipping in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

24. page 184. **"Houdini is the most remarkable . . ."** "Houdini Astonishes 1,600 Members B.A.A." *Boston Post*, March 26, 1906, clipping in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

25. page 184. **“The urethra could easily . . .”** Letter from Dr. S. B. Pratt to Houdini, in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

26. page 184. **Working with his friend Whitman Osgood, a newspaperman, Houdini signed up the Kita-Muras, Oriental jugglers . . .** An original bill from the tour can be found in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University. At other times, the Kita-Muras were billed as “the Kitamuras.”

27. page 185. **On November 26, Houdini opened a run at the Temple . . .** This account appeared in the *Detroit Journal*, November 27, 1906, clipping in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University. Christopher must have used this clipping for his account in Milbourne Christopher, *Houdini: The Untold Story* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), 101–102. On December 2, 1906, the *Detroit Free Press* ran a satirical story, “‘Houdini’s Horror or The Tempered Handcuff’—A Sketch in One Shackle” which turns the event into a morality play.

28. page 185–186. **Standing on the Belle Isle Bridge, he gazed at the current . . .** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 5–8 and the *Detroit Journal*, November 27, 1906, clipping in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

29. page 186. **“I leave all to Bess.”** *Detroit Journal*, November 27, 1906, clipping in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

30. pages 186–187 **“Having met with difficulty . . .”** “Leaps Into Cold River” *Detroit Free Press*, November 28, 1906, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook, 1906–1908, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

31. page 187. **Houdini repeated his bridge jump on May 4, 1907 . . .** Reported in Rochester *Union and Advertiser*, May 7, 1907, and Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 197.

32. page 187. **“He was a good swimmer.”** Houdini diary entry, cited in Silverman note cards for 1907, deposited in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

33. page 187. **On March 13, before his jump off the Seventh . . .** Reported in “Houdini Tells of His Early Start” *Pittsburgh Leader*, March 13, 1908, clipping #129 in the Robinson Locke scrapbook 247, in the collection of the New York Public Library.

34. pages 187 and 189. **“In a minute . . . stunned and bleeding.”** Houdini’s quote is compiled from two accounts he gave of the incident. The first is an unidentified clipping found in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University, the second in “Houdini Tells of His Early Start” *Pittsburgh Leader*, March 13, 1908, clipping

#129 in the Robinson Locke scrapbook 247, in the collection of the New York Public Library.

35. page 189. **“While the manacles . . .”** Unidentified clipping found in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University. Same quotes appear in another article that can be found in a different unidentified article found in Patrick Culliton’s Houdini archives now at the Conjuring Arts Research Center, New York. This leads us to believe that Houdini provided his quotes to local newspapers to use in their preview pieces.

36. page 189. **“Tomorrow I will take a leap . . .”** Houdini to Dr. Waite, August 27, 1907, from the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

37. page 189. **“That’s an awful river. The worst I have ever been in.”** Houdini was quoted in *New Orleans Picayune*, November 18, 1907.

38. page 189. **The stillness in the room was suddenly . . .** The story of Houdini’s coffin escape at the B.A.A. was taken from various newspaper accounts of the event including “Houdini Gets Out of Coffin at the B.A.A.” *The Boston Herald*, January 14, 1907, and “Houdini Near Suffocation” *Boston Post*, January 14, 1907, all from the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

39. page 190. “**a soft pad of feet as of somepanting like a . . .**” “Houdini Gets Out of Coffin at the B.A.A.” *The Boston Herald*, January 14, 1907.

40. page 190. “**I was very tired . . .**” Ibid.

41. page 190. “**Coffin affair a great . . .**” Houdini diary, January 7, 1907.

42. page 191. “**How is the glass box . . .**” Houdini to Dr. Waitt, February 4, 1907, from the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

43. page 192. **He exposed Mysto onstage, called Brindamour . . .** For a good account of the Mysto expose see Milbourne Christopher, *Houdini: The Untold Story* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), 86–87. Houdini not only exposed Mysto onstage, but he and Hardeen and Kukol also posed for a picture spread replicating the exposé that appeared in the London *Daily Mirror* (which was owned by his friend Harmsworth) in the October 4, 1904 issue. Houdini kept the receipt from the carpenter who made an exact duplicate of the coffin that he made for Mysto for Houdini’s expose. It’s in his Imitator’s scrapbook, 262 in the collection of the New York Public Library. As for Brindamour, (or “Brindemour” as Houdini spelled it), Houdini trashed him in his *Conjurers’ Monthly Magazine* of April 15, 1907, 257–259. “He showed me pictures of himself in ballet costume, and seemed to be proud that he could impersonate the female sex so perfectly,” Houdini sneered. Houdini at times would even get irate at Hardeen, his brother, who Houdini had created as his own competition to keep it in the family. In an April 21, 1911

letter from Bess to Hardeen, Houdini's wife acknowledges that Harry was sore at Hardeen for presenting challenge escapes, but assured him that once they were in each other's company again, all would be forgiven. She even offered to pay the fare for Hardeen and his family to meet up with them.

44. page 192. **“Dear Sir, During your last visit . . .”** The Scorrer challenge poster was reproduced in Walter B. Gibson, *Original Houdini Scrapbook* (New York: Corwin Sterling Pub. Co., 1976), 45.

45. page 143. **he refused challenges . . . that didn't fall into his normal classifications** . . . Amazingly enough, Houdini actually gave this long list of challenges he refused to a *New York Press* reporter who quoted him in the April 10, 1908 edition in an article called, “Stunts Demanded of Houdini”, clipping in a scrapbook in the collection of Pat Croce.

46. page 193. **On January 26, 1907, before the principals and ten . . .** “Fay's Faith in Knots Costly,” in unidentified Boston newspaper, January 26, 1907, clipping in Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University. Also see “Houdini Decides Wager of \$1,000” *Boston Herald*, January 26, 1907, clipping in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University. Kellock (1928) also has an account of this unusual challenge on page 194 of his book but he identifies the homeowner as J. S. Foy. Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928).

47. page 194. **“It was the hardest experience . . .”** “Fay’s Faith in Knots Costly,” in unidentified Boston newspaper, January 26, 1907, clipping from the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.
48. page 194. **“Am in my usual rush . . .”** Houdini to Waitt, April 19, 1907, from the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.
49. page 194. **“Must invent some new means . . .”** Houdini diary entry, March 13, 1907.
50. page 194. **“. . . spent three weeks cutting down twenty huge trees . . .”** “How Houdini Made a Pin Cushion Of His Cheek”, *The Bulletin* (San Francisco), August 31, 1907.
51. page 194. **“. . . and learn his intentions . . .”** “Houdini Brothers Will Not Be Rivals” *New York Telegraph*, August 16, 1907, clipping #114 in Robinson Locke scrapbook 247, in the collection of the New York Public Library.
52. page 195. **“I was very much alarmed, to learn that my brother . . .”** “Houdini Brothers Will Not Be Rivals” *New York Telegraph*, August 16, 1907, clipping #114 in Robinson Locke scrapbook 247 in the collection of the New York Public Library.

53. page 195. **“This got into print and it got Harry . . .”** “Houdini-as His Brother Saw Him” by Hardeen, *The Sphinx*, October 1936, 214.

54. page 195. **“against the day when the public gets on . . .”** “Houdini Tells of His Early Start” *Pittsburgh Leader*, March 13, 1908, clipping in Robinson Locke scrapbook 247, clipping # 129, in the collection of the New York Public Library.

55. page 195. **“It has been my good fortune . . .”** Harry Houdini, *The Right Way to Do Wrong: An Exposé of Successful Criminals* (Boston, Harry Houdini, 1906), 4.

56. page 196. **“Dr. L. D. Weiss, of New York . . .”** *Ibid.*, 88.

57. page 196. **“The Wrong time to Do Write”** *The Wizard*, Vol. 2, 1906, 200.

58. page 196. **The Sphinx, the book was banned by the police . . .** *The Sphinx*, June 15, 1916, 63.

59. page 196. **“so well did it answer its title . . .”** *Providence Sunday Journal*, January 24, 1937, clipping in collection of the Library of Congress, Ed Saint scrapbook, 6.

60. page 196. **“But he is always on the side of the law . . .”** *The Sunday Herald* (Boston), magazine section, March 11, 1906, clipping from the Harvard Theatre

Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University. Fragment of the article also appears in Robinson Locke scrapbook 247, 15, in the collection of the New York Public Library.

61. page 196. “. . . **genteel enclave . . .**” “Touring Harry Houdini’s New York” *The New York Times*, October 28, 1994, C30.

62. page 196. “. . . **thought he heard a burglar in . . .**” Entry in Houdini diary, July 24, 1906.

63. pages 196–197. **It was a different story a year later. On October 25, 1907 . . .** We composited this scene from the following accounts: “Slashed by a Burglar” *The New York Times*, October 26, 1907, 20. “Trusted Negro Accused of Attack on Physician” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 27, 1907, 8. “Doctor’s Assailant His Own Servant” *The New York Times*, October 27, 1907, 6. “Burglar Slashes Doctor” *The Washington Post*, October 27, 1907, 15.