

12. Death Visits the Stage

1. pages 215-217. **The audience gasped as the magician....Houdini's career in 1908...**

The story of Genesta's tragic death performing the milk can effect was culled from Walter B. Gibson and Morris N. Young, *Houdini's Fabulous Magic*, (New York: Bell, 1961), p. 106, and *Linking Ring*, November 1930, pgs. 1122 and 1124.

2. page 217. **Hardeen came close to death in the can....** Reported in "Houdini's Assistants" by Patrick Culliton, *Genii*, October 1961, p. 62.

3. page 217. **Houdini began practicing and routinely...** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), p. 201.

4. page 217. **"She saw me do the can trick..."** Ibid.

5. page 217. **Montraville M. Wood, a brilliant inventor....** Brochures advertising Wood's performances can be found in the collection of the Library of Congress. The U.S. Patent office has all the patents of Wood's wonderful inventions on file.

6. page 217. **Chautauqua....** For a discussion of Wood's contributions on the Chautauqua circuit see David Mead, "1914: The Chautauqua and American Innocence", dissertation, Michigan State University, pgs. 347, 352. [More on Wood to follow, WK]

7. page 218. **Houdini and Wood exchanged numerous letters....** The correspondence is in the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

8. page 218. **evident from his diary....** See Houdini diary entries for late January and early February 1908.

9. pages 219-221 **Houdini debuted it....remained inside the can....** See “Houdini Has A Very Uncanny Act”, *St. Louis Star*, January 28, 1908, and “Houdini’s New Trick”, *Variety*, February 6, 1908. For a good overview of Houdini’s milk can effect see “The Milk Can Mystery” in Patrick Culliton and Houdini, *Houdini Unlocked, Book Two: The Secret Confessions of Houdini*, (Kieran, 1997), p. 127-141. In his January 25, 1908 diary entry, Houdini complained “Invited press of St. Louis to be present at my first public exhibition of the water and can trick, and not one appeared.”

10. page 221 **“a feat which borders on the supernatural”** See the advertisement for Houdini’s escape from the Water Torture Cell on June 1st, 1914 at King’s Hall in Dover, England reproduced in Milbourne Christopher, *Houdini: A Pictorial Biography*, (New York: Gramercy Books, 1976), p. 151.

11. page 222. **“he is credited with the power...”** For example, see the promotional booklet for Houdini’s film serial, *The Master Mystery*, 1918.

12. page 222. **“The new Can trick...”** Houdini to Dr. Waitt, February 12, 1908, in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

13. page 223. **“he advertised a reward of \$25 to anyone...”** “Houdini’s New Stunts” in Keith’s Theatre News, undated, clipping in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

14. page 223. **Climbing past the first story was....fourteenth wedding anniversary...** Houdini’s daredevil feat was recorded in “House of Escape King” by Morris Young and Geoffrey Fulton, *Linking Ring*, December 1979, p. 49.

15. page 223. **Harry F. Young, “The Human Fly,” who fell....** Houdini recounts Young’s death in his book *A Magician Among the Spirits*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1924). We are citing the 1972 reprint by Arno Press, p. 140.

16. page 223. **“Mrs. has not been well...”** Houdini letter to Dr. Waitt, March 2, 1908, in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

17. page 224. **You could never find her wearing anything yellow...** Bess’s superstitions are documented in “Houdini’s Personal Side”, a March 15, 1908 clipping from an unidentified newspaper in the collection of Pat Croce.

18. page 224. **“You refer to the fact that Bess...”** Gus Roterberg to Houdini, December 14, 1909. In its entirety, this is a remarkable letter and Roterberg’s brutally candid assessment of Harry and Bess’s relationship speaks volumes about his intimate relationship with Houdini. It can be found in the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.
19. page 224. **Weed Tire Company** The details of Houdini’s escape from the chains can be found in the April 11, 1908 edition of the *New York Press*.
20. pages 224-225. **Houdini’s vicious feud with Dr. A.M. Wilson...** The Helms item that precipitated Houdini’s ire was published in *The Sphinx*, March 15, 1908, p. 4
21. page 225. **“Houdini is yet a young man....”** *The Sphinx*, May 15, 1908, p. 26
22. page 225. **Houdini may be devoting all his...** *Conjurers’ Monthly Magazine*, May 1908, p.270a.
23. page 226. **“I cannot understand why you go...”** Wilson to Houdini, May 20, 1908, in the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.
24. page 226. **“not one stood up for me....”** Houdini diary, June 6, 1908.

25. page 226. **“I know in my heart of hearts...”** Houdini letter to Oscar Teale, November 19, 1906, letter cited in Milbourne Christopher, *Houdini: The Untold Story* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), p.308-309.
26. page 226. **A.G. Waring...** Waring’s turnaround was revealed by him in a letter to Houdini on June 7, 1908, in the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.
27. page 226. **the great Italian conjurer Bosco and deeded.....** While the SAM didn’t contemporaneously acknowledge that it was Houdini who bought the plot, he was given credit for his charitable act by the magic historian Henry Ridgely Evans in his *Adventures in Magic*, (New York: Leo Rullman, 1927), p. 43. [More to follow, WK]
28. page 227. **On April 27, 1908, on the stage of Boston’s Keith’s Theatre...** “The Vaudeville Houses” in *Boston Transcript*, April 28, 1908.
29. page 227. **“Splendid Instructions and Descriptive...”** Roterberg’s ad appeared in Goldston’s *Magician*, August 20, 1908, p. 98.
30. page 227. **Six years later, Hicks was working as a desk clerk...** “How Houdini Did It!” by Joe Whitley, in *Cosmopolitan*, November 1948, p. 60.
31. page 227. **“I think you’d better...”** Ibid.

32. page 227. **He even had cards made up that read....** One of the cards was placed in Houdini's Imitators scrapbook, in the collection of the New York Public Library.

33. page 228. **"His contortions, while rolling about the stage..."** From an article in the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, January 16, 1906.

34. page 228. **"The act I am now doing..."** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), p.208.

35. pages 228-229. **The entire valley was filled with galloping...Tempelhof Field** This account was taken from two articles in the *Washington Post*, September 6 and 12, 1908.

36. page 229. **And back in England, William Melville...** Melville's machinations were uncovered for the first time in Andrew Cook's groundbreaking book, *M- MI5's First Spymaster*, (Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2004).

37. page 229. **On September 15, he noted in his....** Copies of relevant citations in Melville diary provided to us by Andrew Cook.

38. page 229. **writing back to his inventor friend Montraville.....** Unfortunately Houdini's letter to Wood does not survive. But Wood notes Houdini's report in his reply to Houdini on September 14, 1908, letter in the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

39. page 229. **he visited the hunting lodge of Prince Friedrich....** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), p.207.

40. page 229. **“They had a pair of their handcuffs...”** Ibid.

41. page 229. **For his efforts, he received a pin and a nice letter...** Houdini translated the letter and placed it in his scrapbook of Police letters, now in the collection of the New York Public Library.

42. pages 229-230. **It was pitch black.....that lived up to its name** The account was based on the description of Houdini's safe escape in J.C. Cannell, *The Secrets of Houdini*, (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1931), p.28-33.

43. page 230. **a challenge from J.R. Paul, a locksmith....** The original challenge is reproduced in Milbourne Christopher, *Magic – A Picture History*, 2nd edition, (New York: Dover, 1991), p.185.

44. page 230. **“We know that Melville used other magicians as operatives to do similar jobs.”** For example, a magician named Branson was reporting to a Melville associate named MacDonogh. See Major L.H. Branson, *A Lifetime of Deception*, (London : Robert Hale Ltd.), 1953. In this memoir, Branson accounts many instances of using his techniques and knowledge of magic and sleight of hand to conduct espionage

and intelligence gathering while working as the Chief Field Censor for Britain during World War I. Branson worked in the Intelligence division under Colonel Macdonogh who worked directly with William Melville. According to British espionage expert, Andrew Cook, it was Macdonogh's responsibility to manage the secret service budget allocation.

45. page 230. **Will Goldston, the London-based magic dealer...those of a master-mind** “Men Who Made Magic” by Will Goldston, London *Sunday Express*, February 10, 1935, p.9.

46. page 232. **“The poor old deaf landlady had a very bad meal...”** Houdini diary entry, January 1, 1909.

47. page 232. **“I am always glad to hear...”** Gus Roterberg letter to Houdini, December 14, 1909, in the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

48. page 232. **In 1909, he began to direct his collecting zeal....** This was noted in Houdini’s diary. See the March 13, 1909 entry.

49. page 232. **After they argued in a taxicab late one night...** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), p.212-213.

50. page 232. **In Germany, both men and women began to perform...** Houdini letter to Jim Bard, October 11, 1908, in the collection of Steranko.

51. page 232. **In America, a German woman named Minerva...** For information on Minerva, see Brian Lead and Roger Woods, *Harry Houdini: Legend and Legacy*, (self-published, 1993), p.7-13.

52. page 232. **Miss Lincoln Houdini** Houdini has pasted several of her advertisements in his Imitators scrapbook which can be found in the collection of the New York Public Library.

53. page 233. **Houdini was also being imitated by John Clempert...** For more on Clempert see Edwin A. Dawes, *The Complete Rich Cabinet of Magical Curiosities*, CD-ROM, (Surrey, Peter Scarlett, 2005), p. 1016-1019. We also drew on the disparate articles on Clempert collected by Houdini in his Imitators scrapbook in the collection of the New York Public Library.

54. page 233. **“Perhaps this is a pity...”** This quote should not have been definitively attributed to Houdini, although it does have the ring of Houdini’s syntax. It was published in P.T. Selbit’s *The Wizard* , v. 4, July 1909, p.744. Presumably, Selbit wrote it, although it’s possible that Houdini provided the item. That Selbit was opening his column to Houdini press releases is reinforced by the next item, which lauds Houdini’s recent restoration of John Henry Anderson’s grave.

55. page 233. **After instituting a suit, Houdini seemed to have settled the case out of court.** See Selbit's item in his "Gossip" column in the September 1909 issue of *The Wizard*, p. 775.

56. page 233. **"held up a flag of truce..."** Houdini letter to Will Goldston, June 26, 1909, in the Milbourne Christopher collection.

57. page 233. **Steens** Charles-Louis-Fernand Brisbarre was a French escapologist who performed under the name of Steens. Houdini collected many of Steens's advertisements in his Imitators scrapbook, found in the New York Public Library.

58. page 233. **Alburtus** Houdini mentions Alburtus's mishap in the 1922 edition of his pitchbook, *The Adventurous Life of a Versatile Artist*, p. 7. However, a few clippings in his Imitators scrapbook indicated that Houdini had apparently spelled his name wrong, it actually being "Albertus". His business card, in the scrapbook, indicated that he was a "handcuff king" with management in Philadelphia.

59. page 233. **Menkis** See the 1922 edition of Houdini's pitchbook, *The Adventurous Life of a Versatile Artist*, p. 7.

60. page 233. **"I was honestly sorry..."** Unidentified clipping from the London *Umpire*, July 25, 1909, in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

61. page 234. **“Joined Harry Houdini, and as Rex Ricardo....”** Rex Palmer Gordon’s somewhat dubious story can be found in Edwin A. Dawes, *The Complete Rich Cabinet of Magical Curiosities*, CD-ROM, (Surrey, Peter Scarlett, 2005), p. 1315.

62. page 234. **On June 17, 1908, Houdini, heavily manacled....** “Houdini’s Dangerous Dive”, *Variety*, June 18, 1908, clipping in Robinson Locke scrapbook 247 in the collection of the New York Public Library.

63. page 234. **“I realized that in my efforts to escape...”** Quoted in “Houdini – Relating Some of the Hazardous Adventures of This Famous Escape Wizard” by Walter Gibson in *The Original Houdini Scrapbook*, (New York: Corwin Sterling, 1976), p. 213.

64. page 234. **“all but choked to death”** London *Weekly Times and Echo*, November 15, 1908.

65. page 234. **Houdini had to undergo an operation to lance....** Houdini diary entry, November 1909: “Go to Dr. Kolm. Have a bad spot on my derriere cut open, the effects of the strap on straight jacket that runs through crotch. Ought to have it attended to long ago. Glad it’s over. Charges me twelve marks. Very painful to work.”

66. page 237. **the chief commissioner of police refused....** Houdini wrote Will Goldston on November 3, 1908 of his plans to leap straitjacketed from the bridge “if I am not stopped.” He was. See the *Bristol Evening News*, November 13, 1908.

67. page 237. **“The many idlers who were basking in the sunshine...”** Quoted from “Handcuff King – Dives into the Seine from Top of the Morgue”, unidentified clipping in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

68. page 237. **Houdini had incorporated the films into his turn....** The description of Houdini’s act is from the *Aberdeen Daily Free Press*, June 29, 1909.

69. page 238. **Frenchman named Brassac** Brassac was an aviator and engineer who is credited with having “taught Paulhan, Farman, Rougier and Houdini their aeronautical A.B.C.” From *Building*, May 10, 1912.

70. page 238. **there were only a couple dozen aviators in the world at the time...** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), p.216.

71. page 238. **German regiment stationed at the Hufaren parade grounds in Wandsbek, a small town outside of Hamburg...** Milbourne Christopher, *Houdini: The Untold Story* (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1969), p. 115-6.

72. page 238. **It resembled a big box kite, thirty-three feet long by about six feet broad with four vertical panels, dividing the main surface into four large cells...**

This description is based on Houdini's account in *Aeronautic Review*, March 1926.