

8. Taming the Bear

1. page 131. **“This is not fair, Chief Lebedoeff . . .”** We relied on multiple sources to recount Houdini’s cigarette escape in Russia. Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 167–68 has a detailed account, as did William Lindsay Gresham in an article in *Saga*, July 1958, 13–14. Gresham’s magazine article contains considerable more detail than his account in his Houdini biography, *Houdini, The Man Who Walked Through Walls*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1959).

2. page 131. **Butirskaya Prison.** For an account of a visit to the place where Houdini escaped from see the magician Alexander “Sasha” Vorobiev’s article in *M-U-M*, March 1990, 48.

3. page 133. . . . **smuggling in two small tools . . .** The problem with Gresham’s account is his description of the methods of Houdini’s escape.[more to come in later posts – W.K.]

4. page 133. **“What a searching . . .”** Letter from Houdini to Don Turley, reprinted in *Kansas City Journal*, June 25, 1903.

5. page 133. **Flesh-toned false finger.** Houdini writes about using a false finger to hide a handcuff key in *Handcuff Secrets* (London: Routledge, 1909), 5–6.

6. page 133. **“They thought that Franz had something . . .”** Houdini to Jim Bard, April 29, 1903, from the Steranko collection.

7. page 134. **“ . . . high muki kuck . . .”** Houdini to Jim Bard, April 29, 1903, from the Steranko collection.

8. pages 134–35. **“ . . . overcome by simply denying . . . Moscow or St. Petersburg”** Houdini in *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, September 9, 1905.

9. page 135. **The magician had official permission to appear . . .** This was recounted after Houdini’s death by his close friend Dr. Waitt in an article “Tales About Houdini Refuted by Dr. Waitt,” *Boston Globe*, November 6, 1926, clipping in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

10. page 135. **Melville had cooperated for years with the Okhrana.** Andrew Cook, *M: MI5’s First Spymaster* (Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing, 2004), 119.

11. page 135. **Harry Day, a mysterious expatriate American . . .** [details to follow – W.K.]

12. page 135. **“ . . . called at War Office to pass on letter from HH.”** Melville diary entry furnished by Andrew Cook.

13. page 135. **“We leave for Moscow this evening . . .”** Houdini’s account is in the *Dramatic Mirror*, May 2, 1903.

14. page 135. **“As I carry a lot of burglar tools . . .”** Houdini dispatch to *Dramatic Mirror*, May 5, 1903.

15. page 135. **“I think that a butcher in America . . .”** Ibid.

16. pages 135–36. **“I defy the police departments . . .”** This account was taken from Houdini’s recollections in *M-U-M*, January 1923, 143 and Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 165–66.

17. page 136. **“Some of the vilest prison pens . . . reeking dungeons.”** Houdini quoted in “American Prisons Best, Says Houdini” in *Pittsburgh Leader*, October 5, 1906, clipping in Robinson-Locke scrapbook # 247, 35, in collection of the New York Public Library.

18. page 137. **“Japs were able to bring the Russian bear . . .”** Houdini quoted in “Houdini Under Official Eyes,” unidentified 1905 clipping in the “Houdini The Jailbreaker” scrapbook, 1900–1906, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

19. page 137. **“Both Melville and Wilkie had few operatives in the field . . .”** For most of Melville’s career he relied on informants to pass on vital information. “From his early days in the London Metropolitan Police Special Branch Melville developed close ties with the entertainment world. He had a wide variety of informers at all levels. In an era when the vast majority of people visited music halls and theatres several times a week (in the era before cinema, such places represented the major form of entertainment for all social classes) such informers would note names, faces, movements, who they were with etc. Melville also seems to have had informants among prostitutes and brothels. Some of this information was used to persuade others to provide information” - personal communication from Andrew Cook to authors. He also suggested that people who worked for major English companies abroad would send back useful information. Wilkie was in the same boat. Graeme Mount in an essay in Rhodri Jeffrey-Jones *North American Spies* (Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 1991) noted that the Secret Service “received assistance from the Post Office, which intercepted suspicious correspondence, and from interested military personnel and private citizens,” 33.

20. page 137. **Wilke . . . was in the midst of a two-month tour.** Wilkie’s itinerary can be determined from the record of his correspondence in the Secret Service files at NARA. According to the U.S.S.S. index to general correspondence, 1903–1918, card numbers 7 and 8, Wilkie arrived in Europe on July 2, 1903 and returned to New York August 22, 1903.

21. pages 137–138. **“Aha, Mr. Houdini, I am afraid that this task . . .”** The story of Houdini ringing the bells of the Kremlin was composited from several sources. An account in an unidentified clipping in the Houdini papers at the Library of Congress suggests that it was Bess who fired the gun to ring the bells. Bess herself disputed this, according to the mentalist Kreskin, who reported that Kukol had fired the shots from the balcony of their hotel room. Kreskin’s column in a local New Jersey newspaper was referenced in *The Linking Ring*, March 1983, 36. Another account of the episode was furnished by amateur magician Orson Welles on a British television show called *Orson Welles’ Sketchbook*, Episode 4: May 14, 1955. The transcript can be found at www.wellesnet.com/sketchbook4.htm. Welles seems to exaggerate by placing Rasputin at the scene “gnashing his teeth with jealous rage.”

22. page 137. **“Can you ring the bells of the Kremlin?”** Unidentified clipping in the Library of Congress; *The Linking Ring*, March 1983, 36.

23. page 138. **On May 23, Houdini and Bess performed their Second Sight . . .** Houdini’s account in his *Conjurers’ Monthly Magazine*, December 15, 1906, 131. The date May 23 is cited in Milbourne Christopher, *Houdini: The Untold Story* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), 75.

24. page 138. **Houdini had taught Bess a code . . .** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 102–104.

25. page 138. **For example, if he wanted to convey the number one . . .** (note to come – W.K.)

26. page 139. **“Do you find Russian handcuffs . . .”** Reported in “Houdini Tells About Handcuffs,” unidentified clipping in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

27. page 139. . . . **the duchess informed him that anyone who accepted money . . .** “Houdini Bluffed the Grand Duke,” *Toledo Daily Blade*, March 10, 1907, clipping in scrapbook in the collection of Pat Croce.

28. page 139. **“Mr. Houdini, in front of a the serious committee . . .”** Unidentified clipping in Moscow newspaper, May 1, 1903, cited in Silverman note cards, 1901–1905, deposited at the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

29. page 140. . . . **blessed “simpletons . . .”** “Houdini Refused Post of Advisor to Czar,” unidentified 1926 clipping in Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 19.

30. page 140. **“Maria Pavlovna had seen an exhibition of hypnotism conducted by a man named M. Philipp . . .”** “Svengali of the Czar” in *The Washington Post*, December 28, 1902, 24.

31. page 140. **According to an article in The Chicago Herald . . .** “Houdini Was Slated as Master of Russia, Judge Horner Reveals” in *Sunday Chicago Herald and Examiner*, December 12, 1926, I, 20.

32. page 141. **“His influence is so great . . .”** Ibid.

33. page 141. **Rasputin met a grisly fate on December 30, 1916 . . .** For information on Rasputin see Greg King *The Man Who Killed Rasputin* (New York: Carol Publishing, 1996), along with the entry on Rasputin online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grigori_Rasputin. For another take on Rasputin see the recent book by Andrew Cook *To Kill Rasputin* (Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing, 2005).