

The Spirit Fakers of Hermannstadt

by Houdini, 1890-1937

Published: 1924
in »Weird Tales«



HOUDINI, the internationally famous mystifier, who has baffled the public, the shrewdest police and the leading scientists of this and other countries for the past twenty years, herewith presents a story of his adventure never before recorded. It is with pleasure that the publishers of this magazine are able to announce that more stories of the adventures of Houdini will appear in succeeding issues, none of which have ever before appeared in print.

Houdini has always been profoundly interested in spiritualistic and psychic phenomena. He has personally known most of the leading spiritualists of the last thirty years and, strange to say, they are all intensely interested in Houdini from the fact that Houdini has never failed to duplicate any feat of so-called spiritualistic phenomena. He has never been able to discover one solitary fact that would convince him of spirit communication and years ago he made solemn compacts with fourteen of

his closest friends that the one first to die would communicate with the survivor, through an agreed signal. The fourteen have passed on and Houdini still awaits their messages in respectful seriousness.

Volumes could be written of the various feats performed by this Master of Escape. Most of them are well known to practically every one who has seen Houdini in his numerous appearances before the American public. No man living today could equal Houdini in assembling a crowd if it were announced that Houdini would attempt one of his miraculous escapes. But Houdini has had some remarkable adventures and has effected some desperate escapes that were not advertised beforehand: He has traveled to every nook and corner of the globe and in his note book are recorded some of his personal experiences in different climes that if one were not acquainted with the ability of the man, would sound like fiction of the most imaginative sort. Some of these personal experiences will appear in future issues of *Weird Tales*. They will deal with revengeful crooks who have been exposed by Houdini and who literally stopped at no means to be revenged on him. They will set forth the extreme measures resorted to by avaricious scoundrels in their attempts to wrest from Houdini the secrets that have made him so famous. They will tell of traps set for him with all the skill and cunning, ingenious minds could contrive.

Houdini is a lover of books and has the finest collection of psychic, spiritualistic and dramatic works of any man in America. He has just completed a new book on the subject of fraudulent spiritualistic phenomena, "*A Magician Among the Spirits*" (Harper & Bro.) and has written quite a few volumes on various subjects. He is so well known that the latest Funk & Wagnalls' dictionary published the word "Houdinize—to get out of or escape."

Dr. Frank Crane, in his syndicated daily editorials, commented recently on Houdini. "He is one of the most remarkable men of his time. He is not only a famous magician, but he has a most extraordinary equipment of mind and body. He is one of the most perfect and efficient bodies in the world—a very shrewd and resourceful mind. Men like Houdini help along a good deal in the sanity of the world by showing the public that most of the hocus-pocus put forward by people who claim to be assisted by spirits and by magic are nothing but clever tricks."

In another page of this magazine will appear an announcement that Houdini will answer any rational question regarding spiritualistic or psychic phenomena and, such questions and answers that seem of general, interest will be published in this magazine from time to time.—The Editor.

PART I

I HAVE been in many tight places in my varied life; I have met dangers in the most surprising forms; but I have never experienced anything more perilous and weird than when I was held captive by a group of unprincipled blackmailers in an old castle in Transylvania, on the banks of the Maros River, in what was at that time part of Hungary but was later given to Rumania in the settlement that followed the World War.

This adventure came to me most unexpectedly, with no hint of its dangerous character until I was fully drawn into it. I had been exhibiting my skill in various cities of Europe, and had just finished an engagement at Ronacher's establishment in Vienna, mystifying the spectators by escaping from a triple-locked trunk into which I had been thrown manacled. I wanted to see a little of the picturesque country along the Maros River, so, after my engagement at Vienna was finished, I went out alone on what was intended to be purely a pleasure trip, but which turned into as exciting and perilous an adventure as I ever experienced.

In a small village, peopled mostly by Rumanians, although it was in Hungary, I stayed overnight with a grocer's family, amusing the children, as well as their parents, by several little tricks of parlor magic. They must have noised abroad that a magician was stopping with them, for when I was about to depart, the next morning, a heavily veiled woman came to see me, and asked for me by name.

Wondering how the woman knew who I was, I received her in the little living-room which, the family placed at my disposal.

"Mr. Houdini," she said, speaking in the Magyar tongue, "I am in great distress, and you have it in your power to help me. Will you do so?"

"Madam," I replied, "if you will state your trouble, frankly and clearly, I will see what can be done."

She was visibly agitated, and her body trembled, but the black veil hid her features. After, a minute she regained her composure.

"First I must ask you," she said, "whether you believe in spiritualism?"

I was frankly astonished at her question.

"What bearing has this on the matter?" I countered.

"If you are a spiritualistic medium, then I am lost indeed," she replied. "Do you employ the spirits of the dead in your work?"

I smiled.

"On that score you can reassure yourself," I replied. "In all my escapes from handcuffs and trunks and jails, in fact, in everything I do, I use nothing of that sort. As for spiritualism, I neither believe nor disbelieve in it. There may be honest mediums, but so far I have never met one, nor have I ever established communication with the dead. Does that answer your question?"

"Thank heaven," exclaimed my visitor. "I am the Countess—"

She hesitated a minute, then resumed, somewhat incoherently:

"I am the Countess D___, but I must ask you to respect my confidences because the honor of our house depends upon it. I would not come for help to you, a stranger, except that a disaster impends which only you can avert. Unknown to you, your name and influence have been used by an unprincipled gang of blackmailers in an attempt to extort secrets from my younger sister, Rosicka. My father was a very terrible man, Mr. Houdini. Only I and my sister and an old deaf-mute caretaker know the fearful secrets of Castle D___. If those secrets were

related to the world we would be shunned by all decent people and my own hopes of happiness in this world would be killed. I am affianced to a man whom I love deeply but he would never, marry me, the daughter of such a line, if he knew the terrible secrets of our castle. Yet I am in no way tainted with my father's crimes, for I inherit my mother's face and traits. My sister inherits from my father his strength of will and his stubborn determination, but in features and character she too is like my mother, who was all sweetness. Look upon my features, Mr. Houdini, and then say whether you could believe that I am the daughter of one of the most degenerate and opprobrious villains that ever drew the breath of life."

She threw back her veil, and I caught a glimpse of beauty and tender loveliness that made my breath come short. There was in her dark black eyes such a pleading wistfulness that I could not help feeling sorry for her; and though I did not know what she expected or wanted of me, I made up my mind then and there that I would aid her in every way in my power. She gazed at me thus for so many minutes that I became uneasy.

"Come, Madam," I said at last, "reassure yourself. I give you my word that I will help you, and you can trust me absolutely not to reveal your confidences. But I cannot imagine anything your father could have done so terrible that it would cause anyone to hate so fair and sympathetic a woman as you."

"Ah, you little know," she breathed.

Then, with her head bowed in shame and her eyes averted from mine, she told a tale of depravity so terrible that my brows knitted in loathing, and I involuntarily clenched my fists in fierce anger to think that such creatures as this woman's father could ever exist on this fair earth of ours. I even included her in my intense loathing, as her voice broke and trailed off incoherently in the midst of the most revolting details. But when she raised her eyes again, and I saw the horror and fear in them, a great wave of pity surged over me for the unfortunate daughter of a man who could wreak such terrible barbarities upon innocent peasant girls within the dungeons of his castle.

What she told me that night I am under oath never to reveal, and I cannot violate that oath. If I said that her father was a beast in human form, I would be insulting the whole animal order of creation. He was far worse, far lower, than any beast. His daughter's narrative told of the disappearance of women and young girls in the blackness of night, and how the Count had organized searching parties to fool the peasants into believing that he was earnestly trying to find the women and girls who had disappeared, whereas these poor creatures in the dungeons of his castles were undergoing—but I must not forget my oath. Suffice it to say that the mother of the Count's two daughters died from shame and terror, and the two girls (my fair visitor and her sister Rosicka), learning from the ravings of their dying father the truth that they already half suspected, shut themselves off in part of the castle and lived apart from the world, until recently, when they had gone to Hermannstadt, where love entered the life of my visitor, the Countess D___.

"You see well, Mr. Houdini," the Countess continued, "that all my dreams of love and happiness will be over if these terrible secrets are found out. They must remain locked in the breasts of myself and my sister Rosicka, to be buried forever in the grave when we die. Surely no man, no matter how much he might love me, could consent to link his name and family to a line accursed by such a beast as

my father, the Count D____. And yet he bore a good name during his life, and his memory is respected, though I cannot hope for his happiness now that he is dead."

It was on the tip of my tongue to remark that nobody could refuse to forgive one so lovely for sins committed by her ancestors. But the full horror of the story she had just told me caused me to shudder, and I remained silent.

"Three months ago," said the Countess D____, "my sister met, in Hermannstadt, a noblewoman who was deeply interested in spiritualism. She took my sister to several seances, and introduced her to a medium named Popkens. This medium has converted her completely to spiritualism, and he is using his influence to get from her the secrets that would ruin our line.

"Four days ago she brought him to our castle, which stands on the banks of the Maros River two leagues from here. The moment I saw him, I knew that I had seen him before—dark, with small, beady eyes that show a great deal of white; nervous hands with long fingers; a thin, foppishly curled black mustache; and a horrible manner of repeatedly plucking at his beak-like chin with his left hand. There is something sinister about the man. *I know that I have seen him before, and in the very castle itself, while my father was still alive.* Who he is and what he knows, it is beyond my power to say, but I am certain that I have seen him before, and that he is diabolical. If I could only place him definitely, I know I could convince my sister that he is an impostor who purposes nothing good.

"In the last seance that my sister attended in Hermannstadt, she says, he went into a trance, and my father's spirit spoke through Popken's lips, in my father's very voice, commanding her to release his soul from torment by putting into writing the whole revolting and hideousness of his evil deeds on earth, as my sister had heard it from the dying lips of my conscience-tortured father in that terrible delirium that preceded his death—the terrified ravings of a fiend trying to make his peace with God before he dies. As only my sister and I and the deaf-mute caretaker attended him in his final illness, my sister is satisfied that it was really our father's spirit speaking to her. He ordered her to write out clearly and legibly everything he had told her in his delirium, and sign it in the presence of two other persons who would be named by him in a later seance.

"Of course Rosicka refused. She would take no commands from the father whose memory she loathes, but she was greatly worried. Then last night this false medium, Popkens (for I am sure that he is an unprincipled impostor and adventurer), held a seance in the castle itself, which I attended. He claimed to produce the spirit of our saintly mother. The apparition commanded Rosicka to rescue our father from torment by yielding to his wishes, and it named two men who are to witness the affidavit of my sister. As a sign that she was indeed the spirit of our mother, speaking to us from beyond the grave, she said that she had appeared to these two witnesses in dreams, and *they were even now on their way from Hermannstadt to witness the document that my sister Rosicka was to write,* although our mother's spirit had not informed them what the document was.

"The voice was indeed like that of our mother, but there was also a difference. It was that difference which prevented Rosicka from then and there going into her bedroom and spending the rest of the night writing out the fragmentary record of my father's depravities—a record that would cause the countryside to rise against us, and mean the ending of my dream of happiness, if indeed we escaped with our

lives from those whose daughters and sisters suffered from the unbelievable debaucheries perpetrated by my father.

"The apparition of our mother, appearing dimly in the darkened room like a wraith of mist, adjured my sister that she had no right to condemn even the worst of sinners to eternal torment, and his torment would be unending unless a record were left that might be discovered by future generations to expose his shame to the world, so that his spirit could atone. Such a written record of his misdeeds would jeopardize Rosicka's happiness, said the voice, for after the document was duly witnessed she was to bury it behind a certain stone in the famous black dungeon. I knew what was meant by the black dungeon, where in medieval times terrible tortures were inflicted, and I cringed helplessly at the thought of ever going down into that den of iniquity, last visited by my father, whose death was caused by poisoning from the bite of the insane girl he kept shackled there.

"But with that thought, sudden light came in upon me. This man, this fake medium, whom I am certain I had once seen in the castle, knew of the dungeon, knew of my father's crimes, and wanted to lay his hands upon the evidence. The men on their way from Hermannstadt to witness the document are his accomplices. They aim to obtain the document out of the dungeon, after Rosicka has put it there, and then blackmail us out of everything we have, for they know that both Rosicka and I would give up everything and go penniless into the world before we would suffer the ignominy of being branded by the depravities of our father. The false medium, Popkens, professes to know nothing about what happened during his trance, but that is only to convince my sister that the communications she has received are really from our father and our mother. How Popkens knows anything about my father's crimes, or about the delirium that preceded his death, I do not yet know, unless he is really a spiritualistic medium. In that case his dealings are with bad spirits intent upon the ruin of myself and my sister.

"Be that as it may, my sister says that if the two witnesses from Hermannstadt arrive today, as the apparition of our mother prophesied, then she will believe that she has received a solemn command from our mother and will prepare a record of our father's guilt. There is no earthly way, she says, by which the witnesses could be informed to come to Castle D____. Popkens, she says, was in a trance and knows nothing of the communication from our mother, and even had he been conscious he has no means of sending messages to Hermannstadt, and he has not left the castle since the seance. But if Rosicka prepares this paper, then we are lost, for it will fall into the hands of the unscrupulous Popkens.

"When I chanced to come to the village this morning to post a letter to our solicitor in Hermannstadt begging him to hasten to my aid, I heard that a man was here who performed tricks of magic, and from their nature I knew that it must be you. Popkens, one week ago, took Rosicka to see you perform, when my sister was in Hermannstadt. Rosicka has told me that you are really a great spiritualistic medium, that you make supernatural escapes, by spirit aid, although you claim to do your tricks by your own skill, the better to excite the admiration of the public. I asked my sister how she knew this, and she said that Popkens had told her so. He also told her that you were once his pupil in developing your mediumistic powers. My sister saw you shackled and manacled and thrown into a trunk on the stage at

Vienna, and the trunk was then locked and bound around with stout rope. A canopy was then placed around the trunk, to conceal your operations from the audience, and soon you emerged from the canopy, having made your escape. It seemed impossible for any man to perform such a feat by human means, Rosicka said, but Popkens explained to her that you had learned how to project your spirit double, and that it was only your spirit double that went into the trunk, and that you simply materialized yourself and again became visible to the audience. My sister believed implicitly in the medium's explanation."

At this point in the narrative of the Countess I interrupted rather heatedly.

"It is not true," I said. "I am not a medium, and I do not make my escapes by any such means."

"I believe you," the Countess went on, "and that is just what I want you to tell Rosicka. She has seen you. She knows you by sight. If you will go with me to Castle D___ at once, we shall arrive before the accomplices from Hermannstadt get there. Tell Rosicka that you are not a medium. Tell her that Popkens is a liar and an impostor. She will believe you, and the secrets of our line will then be locked within our own bosoms, and yours (for I have revealed to you all of my father's secrets that I know, sparing nothing), and these secrets will perish when we perish. The noble line of D___ will continue, and the happiness which I seek so desperately and so selfishly will be secured. It is little that I ask, Mr. Houdini, but it means everything to me, and I shall pay you well."

She held out her hands imploringly, and her eyes searched deep into mine. I told her that I could not accept her money for a favor which I was only too glad to confer.

We got into a rather dilapidated calash, and started for the castle. The Countess explained that she drove it herself because she wanted nobody at the castle to know of her excursion to the village; and in any case she had only the deaf-mute to call upon, for they lived very simply in a small part of the castle, with but two other servants, who were man and wife, and did all the cooking and took care of the house.

After a drive of slightly more than an hour, we came to Castle D___ on the banks of the Maros River. The old moat was empty, except for a stagnant scum that showed the presence of an inch or two of water; and the castle itself had been badly neglected. One wall of the castle abutted directly upon the river, which washed its base. The grounds were well kept, with smooth lawns and carefully trimmed shrubs and a profusion of roses, testifying to the loving care of the old deaf-mute. The old man saluted as the calash rolled up the dirt road, and then assisted the Countess to get down from the vehicle.

We went directly into the drawing room, and the Countess at once introduced me to her sister Rosicka, who was talking with a dark-skinned and evil-featured man whom I rightly guessed to be Popkens, the medium.

I shall never forget the surprise and consternation with which he heard my name fall from the lips of the Countess. Anger, intense and overwhelming, showed on his face for an instant, and then passed completely away. He forced a broad smile to his lips, and extended his hand in greeting.

"Ah, Mr. Houdini," he exclaimed in passable English, "what a pleasure to meet you here! You don't remember me do you?"

I had never laid eyes on the man before that minute. The brazen effrontery of his greeting disgusted me. I refused the proffered handshake, and, looking him straight in the eyes, I told him:

"Mr. Popkens, your game is up. You are a faker and an impostor, and you have told Miss Rosicka things about me that are not true. I am here to expose you before you have succeeded in your blackmailing schemes."

Popkens' smile became even more broad, and, turning to Rosicka, he exclaimed in Magyar, so rapidly that I could not understand all of what he said to her:

"You see, he knows me. This is the great spiritualist of whom we were talking, who used to be my pupil."

"You are lying to that girl," I exclaimed in English, my temper showing in my face.

"Well, well, my dear Mr. Houdini," he replied, in English, rubbing his hands together, "we shall talk this over at our leisure. If you will allow me, I should like to talk this little matter over with you alone in another room. It will be to your advantage," he added, a menacing glint in his eyes belying the broadness of his smile.

"No, I will talk right now, in Magyar, before these two women," I said, and turned to Rosicka.

Popkens stood for just a minute, until I had launched into my explanation. Then suddenly he leaped upon my back and threw his arms about my head, trying to bend it back and choke me. I was taken off my guard by the suddenness of the attack, and went down in a heap. I quickly shook my assailant from my shoulders, and with a smashing blow to the chin I sent him reeling to the wall. Unfortunately he was not alone, for from the window he had seen the arrival of his accomplices from Hermannstadt before he leaped upon me.

He raised his voice to a shrill, terrified scream, and his confederates rushed into the room and were upon me. There were four men instead of the two that were expected. I was quickly trussed and thrown to one corner of the room, where one of the men sat guard over me with a drawn revolver, to prevent me from undoing my bonds and escaping.

The two servants of the castle had come in alarm at hearing the noise of the combat. They were quickly overcome, and tied into chairs. Then the accomplices, under the direction of Popkens, from whose face the grin had faded, calmly proceeded to tie the hands of the Countess and Rosicka who had shrunk, terrified, to the corner of the room.

I was as much surprised as anyone at the sudden turn events had taken. When I had acceded to the request of the Countess I had expected merely a stormy scene when I denounced the medium from Hermannstadt to prevent him from wresting the secret that would enable him to blackmail the family out of all its possessions. But now I found myself the prisoner of five desperate men, in a Hungarian castle, and these men bore me a deep and serious grudge for spoiling their game. If they killed me, my friends would never know what had happened to me. Certainly Popkens had reason to hate me.

The two witnesses who had come from Hermannstadt to witness Rosicka's document had, of course, been summoned by Popkens, and not by spirits. He had arranged with them before he left Hermannstadt, and knew the very hour they

were expected at Castle D____. His object in perpetrating this hoax on Rosicka was obvious: he wanted her to believe that the spirit message from her mother was authentic, and how better could he accomplish this than by having the spirit of the dead woman announce that the witnesses were coming, and then having their arrival prove the truth of the message? So Popkens cleverly had the apparition say that the witnesses were actually on their way.

The two men had brought with them two others in the guise of servants, in case of emergency. As there was no longer any reason for them to retain this assumed position, they now appeared in their true light as accomplices of Popkens. This I gathered from the conversation, although my knowledge of the Magyar tongue was not sufficient to enable me to understand all that was said. It became quickly evident that they were intent upon forcing Rosicka to write the blackmailing document at once, by any means within their power.

To my intense indignation, Popkens stepped toward the girl and slapped her face. This was a bad blunder, for it set the stubborn spirit of the girl against any compromise with this gang of blackmailing desperadoes who had made her the dupe of their pretended mediumistic powers. The woman servant screamed loudly, and one of the men gagged her with the scarf from the back of the chair in which she was bound, although her screams would prove unavailing in any case, since the aged caretaker of the castle grounds was the only person within the range of her voice, and he was deaf.

I relieved my feelings by a stream of rather vigorous English, telling Popkens what I thought of a man who would strike a bound and defenseless woman. He grinned maliciously, and, coming over to the corner where I lay, he deliberately kicked me in the pit of the stomach.

By this time I had freed myself from my bonds, and sprang upon Popkens. The man with the revolver did not dare to fire, for fear of hitting Popkens, but he managed to bring down the butt of his revolver with crushing force upon my head. I was dazed for a minute, and crumpled to the floor. The men tightly bound me again, and Popkens produced from a black handbag a pair of strong handcuffs, which he locked around my wrists so tightly that they cut into the flesh.

"Mr. Handcuff King," he said to me in English, "we will see what you can do with these pretty bracelets on your wrists. You have publicly challenged anyone in Hungary to shackle you with handcuffs that you cannot pick. These, my dear sir, are not a special make, but I fear you will not get out of them as easily as you slipped out of the German police handcuffs in the jury room at Cologne. Oh yes, I know all about that. Your reputation has preceded you into Hungary."

Then, in Magyar, he ordered one of his accomplices to bring a hammer and a nail. While these were being looked for, the two servants were removed and carried to another room. Popkens, meantime, was carving a lead pencil into long strips. When the hammer was brought, he smashed the locks of the handcuffs by driving the iron nail into them, and then, withdrawing the nail, he drove the pieces of the lead pencil into the lock, plugging it tightly.

Leaving the Countess and her sister tied to the table, the five men dragged me out into the hallway, where Popkens proceeded to rip off my clothes with a sharp knife, until I was stark naked. He then searched my hair for concealed keys and lock-picks.

"I am merely playing fair with myself, Mr. Houdini," said Popkens, with the most malignant grin I have ever beheld. "I am not giving you a chance to open locks with any files or saws or picks that you may have concealed in your clothes. So you will have to excuse me if I remove your garments. I am going to introduce you to the inside of a dungeon, of which even the Countess does not know the existence. I have gone too far now to stick at putting you out of the way. But I am not going to murder you, Mr. Houdini. You will simply die of starvation, and if ever you are found, it will be years after we are gone from here, and only your bones will remain to tell the world that this was Houdini."

I struggled until I was exhausted, but my captors tied my ankles together with coarse wire, blindfolded me, and then carried me through seemingly endless passages, down a winding and damp stairway, to a musty recess at the bottom of a dungeon. Here I was dropped through a hole in the dungeon floor into a muddy cavern, and Popkens jumped down after me. Around my arms, which were already tightly handcuffed behind me, he passed a double pair of fetters that were riveted to the castle wall behind me. Then the bandage was removed from my eyes.

I lay naked on the muddy floor of the blackest, most evil-smelling cavern that it has ever been my lot to see in years of traveling in foreign countries. It was what is called an "oubliette"—a dark hole where prisoners are thrown and forgotten by the world until their skeletons are found years later.

I was not the first occupant of that dismal cavern, for Popkens had removed from the fetters a partially clothed skeleton before he clasped the gyves upon my own arms. I looked at this grisly object, lying in the mud beside me, as Popkens' lantern threw its weak rays around that terrible place, and I shuddered. Bits of mouldy clothing still clung to the bones, and the skull, which had fallen off as Popkens' accomplices threw the skeleton to one side, stared at me out of eyeless sockets, as if grimacing in unholy glee at finding a companion after all these years. I judged, from the appearance of bits of clothing, that the skeleton was that of a girl, and indeed, some of her long hair was sticking to the wall behind me. I could feel it against the back of my neck.

Popkens kicked me in the ribs, and then climbed out of the dismal hole, assisted by one of his accomplices, who let a rope down to him. I was left in complete and terrible darkness.

Not even the Countess knew of the existence of the oubliette, Popkens had said. It must have been reached, then, through a secret passage, possibly through a hidden door. How, then, did Popkens know the passage that led to it, or even know of its existence? I remembered that the Countess recognized him as someone she had once seen at the castle in years gone by, although she could not say when or under what circumstances. Truly the man had a sinister history. His connection with the castle, and possibly with the dissolute old count, must have been far closer than the Countess suspected.

I have been in many difficult situations, but never did my prospects seem so dismal as at that moment. I have suffered worse physical tortures at Blackburn, England, where I was manacled and trussed in iron by a strong man on the stage of the Palace Theater, on October 24, 1902, and suffered brutality until my arms and wrists were torn and bleeding from the irons, of which the locks had been plugged in violation of the rules of fair play, even as they were plugged by,

Popkens in this instance. But in that instance I could have released myself from my tortures at any minute if I had merely admitted myself beaten instead of continuing my struggle with the irons until I finally freed myself by my own efforts. But now there seemed no way out of my tortures, as I lay naked in the mud of the oubliette, fettered to the wall, under the bed of the Maros River, in a musty cavern through the walls of which the niter was seeping.

Release from the fetters of the oubliette was not as difficult as I had feared, but my plugged handcuffs held my wrists rigidly, and the flesh was swelling beneath the cruel bite of the steel, making it doubly difficult to extricate myself. However, having released my arms from the wall, I felt more comfortable, and was enabled to disentangle my ankles from the wire that bound them. I could not climb out of the oubliette with my hands shackled behind me, but I resorted to an old trick—I bent forward and doubled my legs until I was able to loop my fettered arms around my feet and bring my hands, still shackled, in front of me.

Then fell to me a grisly task, which I think I would not care to repeat for the combined fortunes of Rockefeller and Henry Ford. My captors, after all their precautions to remove all clothing and everything that might serve to pick a lock, had overlooked the human skeleton that lay beside me in the oubliette. I knelt on the skeleton and splintered the ribs. Indeed it was with a bone broken from the skeleton by my feet that I was able to open the gyves that fettered me to the wall, and this was not so difficult as might be supposed, after I had solved the problem of how to get hold of the bone and manipulate it. This required a good deal of contortionistic skill, but was easy as compared with the task of opening the locks of the handcuffs that had been plugged with wood and mashed with a nail.

In my long and adventurous career I have never failed to open a lock, but this was not a legitimate test, any more than the test on the stage at Blackburn was legitimate. I had succeeded there, but it seemed as if I was facing utter failure here. I got the wooden plugging out of one of the cuffs, when the fear seized me that the false spiritualists might return to murder me. Popkens, as I had learned from his remark about my escape from handcuffs at Cologne knew that I had opened the best locks of the German police, and he might conceivably be struck with the possibility that I could escape also from his manacles, plugged though they were.

I climbed out of the oubliette into the dungeon above it, unlocked the massive door of the dungeon (which was easy work as compared to opening some of the locks in American jails), and stepped out into a damp passageway. A ray of light wavered along the passageway, and I sprang back into the dungeon, just in time to avoid discovery. I nearly fell back into the oubliette in my haste. True enough, they had sent a man back to put an end to me. He raised his lantern and threw its rays through the barred square in the upper part of the massive dungeon door. I crouched directly beneath the opening, and he failed to see me.

I heard him fumble with the lock, and he opened the door hesitatingly, surprised to find that the key turned so easily. His back, was toward me as he set down the lantern. In his right hand he held a revolver, with which he evidently intended to shoot me. I sprang upon his back, looping my handcuffed arms over his head, and bent his head back. Although my wrists were manacled, I had the advantage which attaches to surprise. I got him under me, and pressed my knee

into his throat. I was choking him into insensibility when part of the dungeon floor gave way, precipitating him head first into the oubliette, out of which I had climbed a minute before. The lantern crashed into the opening and went out, leaving us both in darkness. I groped my way out into the passage, feeling my way up step by step, for I feared hidden holes and trap-doors that might drop me into the Maros River.

I ascended a long, winding stairway, and finally saw a dim light ahead of me and came out into a gloomy corridor in the upper part of the castle. True enough, the dungeons were reached by a hidden panel, which had been left open by the man who had just gone down to kill me I closed it, and admired the absolute skill with which it was concealed. But the Countess and her sister Rosicka were in the power of Popkens and his unscrupulous companions, who were perhaps torturing them into giving them the document that the blackmailers wanted, and my own position was precarious, so I had little time to admire the skill of construction of that panel.

I must get away, remove my manacles, get some clothes, and summon help. I climbed out of a window in the castle tower and began to descend the wall in the fading twilight, manacled though I was. Then I remembered that in my eagerness to reach safety I had neglected to lock the door into the dungeon above the oubliette. This was the mistake that nearly cost me my life.

After finishing a theatrical engagement at Ronacher's establishment at Vienna, Houdini, Master of Escape, takes a jaunt through the Maros valley. He is approached by the Countess D____. who has fallen in the hands of some unprincipled blackmailers headed by the notorious Popkens, a self-styled spiritualistic medium. Popkens has been endeavoring to secure from the Countess D____ and her sister, Rosicka, a written confession of their dead father's misdeeds, intending to later use this confession against them. Houdini is persuaded to accompany the Countess D____ to the castle where he temporarily falls into the hands of Popkens and his comrades. He is shackled and thrown into a secret dungeon of the castle where he escapes by methods known only to himself. At which point you take up the narrative:

PART II

DESCENDING the side of Castle D____ with my hands manacled in front of me was rather a ticklish business, but owing to the shape of the stones there were many crevices into which I could dig my fingers, and the wall was rough enough to provide support for my bare feet. I would have made my escape without great difficulty, except for my hasty oversight in not locking the door to the dungeon when I left it after having thrown my assailant into the oubliette.

The man managed to make his way out, and he recovered his revolver, which had either been precipitated into the oubliette with him, or else was lying on the

floor of the dungeon in which I had fought him. I went slowly down the wall of the Castle D___ to within twenty feet of the river, when he made his appearance at the window of the tower above me, revolver in hand.

He fired two shots at me, but fortunately he was too excited to aim accurately. I half dived, half fell, into the Maros River. The water could not have been more than six or seven feet deep where I dived, for my head came in contact with the bed of the river and I came near being stuck in the soft mud. I struck out under water for the opposite shore, for my only hope lay in getting away from accurate range of the man's weapon.

Swimming with the hands manacled is not as difficult as might be imagined. Those who have seen my motion picture, *Terror Island*, in which I have to enter a ship through a door in the bottom, will realize that I am a strong swimmer, and my skill stood me in good stead now. A lump of warm lead, deflected by the river, touched me gently on the shoulder and sank heavily past me. I realized that the scoundrel in the castle window was still shooting at me, and I wondered whether he could see me from his position above the river, as I swam under water as close to the river bottom as I could.

Forced at last to come up for air, I found that I was well past the middle of the river, and that the water was shallow enough to stand. I showed hardly more than my nose above the surface, however, for I did not care to reveal myself as a target for flying bullets, even though the dusk was deepening every minute. I took a deep breath, and continued my progress along the bottom.

I finally pulled myself out in the shadow of some bushes that grew on the bank. Peering through these, I saw two faces at the window through which I had escaped a few minutes before. My assailant had been joined by another of the gang, who doubtless had hurried to his aid after hearing the shots. Another report rang out, and a bullet hit the water under the castle, close where I had dived. My foes had not seen me, then, as I swam across the river, for they believed I was where I had fallen in.

This conjecture was confirmed a minute or so later when another of the gang came to the water's edge. He peered along the buttress to see if he could discover my body lying on the bottom. He also fired one shot into the water near where I had gone into the stream. Cupping his lips, he shouted up to the two scoundrels in the window, and then began peering very carefully into the river, walking downstream for a hundred yards, in an attempt to locate my body. Coming back to the buttress, he again searched the water carefully, looking upstream toward the spot where I had fallen in. He again cupped his lips and shouted back to his fellow conspirators. They shouted back to him to remain on guard and keep up the search. Then they left the window.

The darkness grew thicker, and I worked to free myself from the handcuffs. I had picked out the wooden plugging from one of the locks before I left the oubliette, but the other was more difficult, for the plugging had swollen as a result of its bath in the river. However, I soon had both hands free, and I chafed my wrists to restore the circulation, for they had been cruelly lacerated by the close bite of the steel.

How I unlocked the handcuffs is, of course, my own secret. Even though the locks were mashed, I found them less difficult to remove than the German police

handcuffs at Cologne, during the trial of my suit against the police official who had slandered me by publicly proclaiming me a charlatan. At Cologne, I was stripped and fastened by a pair of expertly made links, which, on the testimony of the locksmith who made them, *could not be opened even by the key that locked them*. The handcuffs that Popkens had clamped so tightly on my wrists, however, were ordinary police manacles, and I was thoroughly familiar with their construction, for I have made locks my special study for many years. (This particular cuff was made in Sheffield, England and was one in general use throughout the continent. It is a clumsy cuff and can be jarred open by a quick glancing blow on the open side of the manacle. This causes the spring to snap back, which in turn pulls back the small bolt.) But my wrists were bleeding, and my whole body ached from the brutal treatment I had endured at the hands of the gang from Hermannstadt.

My first thought was to summon help. With this in mind I clambered through the bushes and struck out haphazard in the general direction of the village I had left. Then I thought of Rosicka and the Countess D___, and the devils in human form in whose power they were held at that moment, and I resolved upon the dangerous plan of returning to Castle D___ to their aid.

If I had coolly weighed the chances against me, I probably never would have considered such a foolhardy line of conduct as returning to the castle. The men there were my foes. They were well armed, and desperate. I was unarmed, and naked. Yet, after all, I had the advantage which attaches to surprise. The five men from Hermannstadt believed me dead. The obviously sensible thing to do was to find a peasant and summon aid at once, but at the moment this seemed like a tremendous waste of time, for the blackmailers had Rosicka and the countess in their power, and were perhaps even now torturing them into revealing the dead secrets babbled by their father in his dying delirium. So I determined to take advantage of the darkness and return.

I could no longer see the sentinel on the opposite bank, but I did not doubt that he was there. Taking the handcuffs with me, I warily slipped into the Maros River, and swam noiselessly to the opposite bank. I crawled out cautiously, and retreated into the shadows. Pretty soon I heard the sentinel coming slowly toward me. Straining my eyes to see him as well as possible, I crouched to spring. He must have seen my white body move in the darkness, for he uttered an exclamation, and his hand was on the trigger of his revolver as I knocked it from his grasp.

He was completely taken by surprise, and offered amazingly little resistance. I took his outer garments from him and handcuffed him with the steel bracelets that Popkens had used on me. He made no outcry, and I gagged him to prevent his giving an alarm. With strips torn from his own undergarments, I then tied him to a stout shrub, and proceeded to clothe myself in his trousers and blouse. I even tried on his shoes, but they were much too big for me. I reflected that it would be easier to climb the castle with bare feet than with shoes on, in any event, so I contented myself with the man's outer garments, and turned my attention to entering the castle.

I suppose I could have entered boldly through one of the doors without being detected, but the risk of meeting someone seemed too great. I had found, on my descent, that the rough wall of the castle was very easy to climb, so I decided to enter by the human fly method. I scaled the wall, and made my entrance through

one of the windows in the second story. I stood noiselessly in the darkness for a minute, and then began to feel my way toward that part of the building in which the spirit fakers from Hermannstadt had confined Rosicka and the Countess D___.

The door into the corridor was locked, for I had come into one of the rooms that was no longer used, but I unlocked it with much greater ease than many American jail locks, for it was old, very simply constructed, and yielded readily to my knowledge.

As I passed noiselessly down the corridor, I heard a low moaning from one of the rooms. The door was closed, but not locked, and I stealthily entered. It was the room into which the old servants, the man and his wife who looked after the upkeep of the castle and cooked the meals, had been thrown by Popkens and his co-conspirators. The ruffians had not even gagged them, for there was nobody within hearing distance besides themselves and the deaf caretaker of the grounds, when they were thrown into the room. It was the woman who was moaning. She was lying face down on the floor, tied to a bedpost, and her position was painfully uncomfortable. In addition, she was badly frightened, for she expected no mercy from men so brutal that they would strike a girl like Rosicka and offer such indignities to the Countess.

I released them both, and sent the man posthaste in search of help. I was afraid to let the old woman go with him, for fear he would not return, once they had left the dreaded castle behind them. So I told her to remain in the room. I cautioned her husband to make no noise as he went out, and together we stole like two cats through the dark corridors and out into the night. I grasped his hand, whispered in Magyar a command to return with all possible speed as soon as he got a sufficient number of men together to effect a rescue, and then I returned to the castle.

I heard a weird voice, sounding like a woman's voice, coming from the large room where Rosicka and the Countess had been tied up. I listened at the door for several minutes, but I could make nothing of the sound. No light came from beneath the door, and I judged that the room was in darkness. Still that uncanny voice droned on, in Magyar. I could not distinguish many words, for the voice came to me very faintly through the door. My curiosity and my anxiety at length got the better of my fears, and I noiselessly, stealthily, opened the door.

A luminous ring was moving in weird spirals high in the air. The voice had ceased momentarily, but soon the luminous ring ceased its spiraling and remained stationary, and the voice spoke again, softly, with a peculiar wailing intonation. I was puzzled to know what was happening. Then the truth flashed upon me, and I was amazed at the utter audacity of Popkens. Having failed in this attempt to extort from Rosicka the secrets of her dead father, he had the effrontery to resort once more to a spiritualistic seance in an effort to break down her resistance, before attempting to apply torture.

No other sound was heard except the breathing of the four men, and a smothered exclamation from time to time from one or the other of the two women, who had been placed at one end of the table, as I found out afterward, and bound into their chairs. The voice droned on, and I soon realized that Popkens was trying to make Rosicka think that it was her mother's voice commanding her to reveal the secrets.

The seance, after all that had happened, could hardly be expected to convince anyone, especially Rosicka, for she knew now that the men were unscrupulous charlatans. The plan was unworthy of so clever a man as Popkens, for, now that Rosicka had seen that the men from Hermannstadt were in reality his accomplices, and other happenings had dashed her faith in him, she could hardly believe in the reality of any spirit voices that he might produce. But Popkens, the charlatan, confident of his own powers to deceive, and knowing full well that he could imitate to perfection the voices of the girl's parents, still thought he could work on Rosicka's credulity through a seance, despite all that had occurred to undeceive her.

I listened for a while to the voice. The language was, of course, Magyar, but, as the voice spoke very slowly, I had very little difficulty in understanding it. Despite the weird, sepulchral quality of the tone, which the medium obtained by holding rolled-up paper in his mouth while he was speaking, the voice must have borne a distinct resemblance to the living voice of Rosicka's mother, for presently the girl started weeping, and little choking sobs joined the sepulchral voice in a weird duet.

The voice told Rosicka that her father was undergoing terrible torments, because of the sins he had committed while in the body. In any case, it said, the torments would continue for many long years, for the man had sinned grievously, but, since no one was utterly beyond redemption, Rosicka had the chance to assist her father to a possible future atonement and end to his sufferings. She was to write out the terrible confessions of her father, made in his delirium, and sign it in the presence of the men who had come from Hermannstadt, so that they could witness the signature. It would not be necessary to read it to them, but she must show the confession to Popkens. Then she should take the paper, alone, into the black dungeon, and conceal it behind a certain stone in the wall, which the voice described in detail. This stone was loose, and could easily be pried out with a knife. She should place the stone, and say nothing to anyone about what she had done. Popkens, said the voice, was very evil, and she was loath to let him know the confession, but there was no other way in which the evil Count D___ could be offered the chance to expiate his crimes; and furthermore a spell had been put upon Popkens that would make him powerless to make known to anyone the contents of the document. She had been obliged to use Popkens as a medium, because the spirit of Count D___ could not get into rapport with a medium of more refined psychic fiber, but the spirit of the Countess would lend Rosicka her aid. The document could not be used by Popkens in any case, the voice explained, because it would be hidden in the black dungeon, and his mere knowledge of its contents could not harm Rosicka or her sister unless Popkens could prove his statements. The other four from Hermannstadt would witness merely the signature, and would not read the contents of the document. Then, perhaps centuries later, someone would discover the paper, and with this earthly revelation of the old Count's crimes a chance would be given his spirit to make expiation.

I was more and more amazed as the seance proceeded. Popkens evidently thought he could convince Rosicka that the spirit voice was genuine by branding himself as evil, for Rosicka now knew that he was evil, and might take the frank admission of this fact as a sign of the truth of the seance. Truly, Popkens had

found the girl so easy to dupe in earlier seances that he overestimated her gullibility.

I stole cautiously around the group, a shadow among the shadows of that great room. I stopped directly behind the false medium. As long as the men were not actually torturing the women, I thought it best to allow the seance to continue, and thus allow time for the reinforcements to arrive. But now the voice trailed off indistinctly and died away in a soft whisper. The luminous ring, which was nothing more nor less than a phosphorescent ring painted on the wide mouth of a long speaking trumpet, again began describing its weird spirals in the air over the head of the sitters. Popkens stirred uneasily, although he was *supposed* to be in a trance. He was manipulating the speaking trumpet, which is part of the stock in trade of every medium, when I suddenly seized the hand that held it, and closed my left hand over his windpipe.

I knew the signs. I knew that the seance was about over. A lamp would be lighted, I would be discovered in the room, the two women would be tortured (since the seance had failed to convince them), and the men would either kidnap them or extort the document from them before help could arrive. Help might already be close at hand, or it might not come for hours. My own position would become precarious in any case, for the men would undoubtedly murder me out of hand. There was nothing for it except to prolong the seance. Since the medium was about to come out of his supposed trance and bring the sitting to an end, I resolved to take his place and continue the seance.

My grip was like steel at his throat. He could not cry out, nor could he release his right hand from the powerful hold I had obtained on it. He clawed frantically at the hand that was shutting off his wind, and a strange bubbling gurgle came from his throat. This alarmed me, but needlessly.

"He is coming out of his trance," whispered one of the men to Rosicka, for so he interpreted the sound that he had heard.

Popkens slumped into an unconscious heap. I stuffed his own handkerchief into his mouth as a gag, and slit his blouse with his own knife, silently, to obtain strips wherewith to bind him. This I did, silently, while the sitters were waiting for him to utter the groan that should show the spirit control had left him and he had recovered consciousness. I had attended many seances. I knew the procedure well.

I trussed up his legs so that he could not kick or make any other noise with his feet when he came to, and took the medium's place at the head of the table. Straightway the luminous circle again began to weave its loops and spirals over the heads of the sitters, but it was I who manipulated the trumpet, and not Popkens. He lay behind me in a trance that was much more real than any he had ever undergone during his seances.

I had withdrawn from his pocket, while searching for his knife, several wads of paper, already rolled, and I stuck some of this in my mouth to give my voice a sepulchral sound. In my case this procedure was really necessary, for if I had spoken in a natural voice, the American accent with which I spoke Magyar would have betrayed me. But, with paper in my mouth, and my voice further disguised by the speaking trumpet, I began to talk, very slowly, in broken words, as if I were the spirit of old Count D____, torn with contrition, and begging, pleading for a chance to expiate.

I continued in this vein for twenty minutes or more, when I realized that the other conspirators were getting restless. I don't think they suspected I was not Popkens, no matter how poor my Magyar accent may have been, for they could hardly dream of anything so strange as Houdini, whom they had seen drowned in the Maros River, returning to overpower the medium and take his place. But they had not expected so long a seance, and were impatient to have it over with.

I sensed this impatience, and prepared to meet the inevitable discovery of my presence. Of the five men, one was bound and lying by the river's bank. Popkens was trussed up, gagged and unconscious on the floor behind me. Three were left to oppose me. The seance had continued for the greater part of an hour before I took Popkens's place. Help might come at any minute. But I could not count upon this, for I did not know how far the old servant had to go to summon aid.

The sepulchral voice in which I was speaking trailed off into silence as Popkens's voice had done. Rosicka had long since ceased sobbing, for she no longer heard her mother's voice. I arose silently and stole like a shadow to the two women. I cut their bonds with the knife I had taken from Popkens, and then pondered what else I could do to protect myself and the two girls. The thought came to me that I could overcome each of my remaining three assailants in the same way I had overcome Popkens, and I proceeded forthwith to grapple with one of them. But I missed my first hold in the darkness and he uttered a frightened oath as I grabbed him. He half arose and his chair crashed to the floor. We fell together, I on top, and I quickly had my knee at his throat. Then one of the other two men lit the lamp.

I drew the revolver of the man under me and sprang to my feet. I was not quick enough, for I found myself looking into the muzzle of another revolver.

"Drop that weapon!" my opponent shouted.

I suddenly dropped to the floor, at the same time raising my right leg in a tremendous kick at the man's hand. He fired as I dropped, and the revolver flew out of his hand. My bare foot had landed, painfully for me, on the weapon, but the kick had disarmed the man. I at once covered the other man, who had lighted the lamp, and asked Rosicka to take his weapon from him. The Countess picked up the other revolver. The man I tried to throttle arose and rushed at me, snarling like a wild beast. I was forced to shoot, and I sent a bullet into his knee. He sank to the floor, with a look of pain, and reached for his revolver. He was out of his head from rage and pain. Fortunately for me, his weapon was in my hand instead of his.

"You see," I exclaimed in Magyar, "resistance is useless. The old servant went for help a long time ago, while I stayed here and heard your leader trying to delude the ladies into thinking it was their mother's voice they were hearing. There is your leader on the floor."

I pointed to Popkens.

"He is unconscious—no, he is coming to. See, he is blinking his eyes. I have been Popkens for twenty minutes, while Popkens has been lying there in a trance. It is well for you that you did not shoot me. It would mean the rope for all of you."

The men glowered at me. The man on the floor sat nursing his knee and cursing very loudly.

"The police have been notified," I said, "and soon there will be many strong men here to take you into custody. Now, if you please, you will let the ladies pass out of

the room. It is not pleasant for them to listen to such cursing as our friend in the corner is indulging in."

I waved my hand toward the man with the wounded knee.

"No, by God!" howled the shorter of the two men, barring Rosicka's way to the door. "They will stay here, and we will do the going out ourselves. Stand out of the way, while I release Popkens."

Popkens by this time had spit out the handkerchief that I had stuffed into his mouth, and launched out into a stream of as disgusting and filthy profanity as ever I have heard. I did not understand nearly all of it, but Rosicka looked sick, and the eyes of the Countess opened wide in horror. I would not let the men untie him, and they would not let the two women pass through the door. We had reached an impasse, as they would not obey my commands, despite the weapon in my hand.

Then suddenly one of the men kicked the lamp over, and as it crashed to the floor the room was plunged into darkness. Rosicka uttered a shriek as one of the scoundrels wrenched the revolver from her. Several flashes of fire spit into the gloom as the man shot at me in the darkness. But the sound of many feet caused them to burst out into the hallway.

They were too late, for they ran plumb into the arms of a dozen peasants, who were armed with heavy clubs, pitchforks; and axes. The peasants had been summoned by the old servant, who accompanied them back to the castle. They quickly disarmed the man who had the revolver, and trussed up all three captives in the room where Popkens lay straining at his bonds. Three of the peasants went out to the river bank and brought in the man I had tied up.

The situation was hopeless for the men from Hermannstadt, but Popkens had not yet played the last card in his game of brazen effrontery. Beaten in his efforts to obtain the document, he now sought to effect his own release and the release of his companions from the trap into which they had fallen.

"I think, Countess," said Popkens, who had just been swearing so frightfully before her. "I think you had better instruct your people to unbind me and my comrades and let us go back to Hermannstadt. There are certain secrets about your father that you might not care to have made public, and if these people knew them, they would probably chase you out of the country."

Rosicka turned white. I thought then, by the strange set of her lips, and I still think now, that it was righteous and fierce anger rather than fear that made her blanch. I felt keenly for the poor girl in that moment, but the Countess won my heartiest admiration. She turned her dark eyes on Popkens with all the dignity of a queen.

"I haven't the remotest idea what you are talking about," she said. "These people all knew my father, the Count X___, and if I were you I would not slander the memory of that great and good nobleman. I think, after all that has happened, you will not find anyone who will believe you."

This was a master stroke. Popkens realized how precarious his situation was, and what actual physical danger he was in. Besides, he had no proofs.

I saw the Countess in Hermannstadt later, after the hearing on the cases of the five spirit fakers. From her I learned that Popkens had formerly been an agent of the Count, her father, and it was as such that she had seen him at Castle D___.

Popkens was so close to the Count that he had been associated with him in his dark crimes, and he did not dare reveal, them to the authorities because of his own criminal connection with them.

Under duress, however, he told this story, which was as near a confession as he made: he had acted as agent for the Count in a large number of promotional schemes backed by the Count's money, but in which the Count's name did not appear. The Count had cheated him out of all his share of the earnings, and threatened to expose him as the active agent in a number of mysterious robberies, in which the Count, to protect himself, had manufactured evidence pointing toward Popkens as the perpetrator. Popkens, had known of the oubliette and the black dungeon during his association in the dark deeds of the Count, and he knew the mysteries of the castle as well as the Count himself. He had returned to Castle D___ to demand a final accounting from the Count by threats of exposing his infamies, and made his way to the Count's room only to find him dying. The two girls were in the bedroom, and Popkens listened outside the door to the remorseful man's delirium. That was how he knew that the two girls were in possession of the Count's secrets. He had become a spiritualist charlatan thereafter, having dabbled in black magic and deceptive tricks, and one day, when the Count's daughter Rosicka attended one of his seances in Hermannstadt, he conceived the bold plan of getting her, by trickery, to write down the confessions made by the Count in his dying delirium. He knew the black dungeon, and he planned to steal the document after Rosicka had placed it behind the stone, and then he could blackmail them out of all they possessed in return for restoring the document to them. Thus he would revenge himself upon the Count's descendants, and become master of their estates.

Popkens was convicted of conspiracy, attempted murder, and kidnaping, and he and his companions were given long prison terms. Among his disciples in Hermannstadt was a Russian named Ileanadorff,^{*)} who left Hermannstadt and made his way back to Russia before the authorities could apprehend him.

I have reason to believe that Ileanadorff was in reality the false monk Ileador, known as Rasputin, who became the most sinister figure in Russian history. It will be recalled that Ileador, or Rasputin, witnessing the feats of black magic performed in the Czar's court by Irving Bishop, told the Czarina that he could do much more marvelous things, and from that time he gradually gained an ascendancy over the Czarina, and later the Czar, that made him the real ruler of Russia. Never was any other ruler so profligate and wicked as Rasputin, the evil force behind the throne of Czar Nicholas II.

Countess D___ thanked me for all I had done for her, and told me she had but one regret in the whole matter.

"What was that?" I asked.

"Do you remember," she replied, "that when Popkens tried to threaten me before my peasants, I told him my father was a great and good nobleman whom I would not allow him to slander? It is the memory of that lie that hurts. If it were to be done over again, I do not think I could say a good word for my father, even if life itself were at stake. I ask only that he be forgotten. Mr. Houdini, you and I and Rosicka and that devil Popkens are the only persons in the world who really know what my father was. You can sympathize with my feelings."



*) A fantasy name or a typographical error for "Iliandroff" (a Bulgarian name) or "Aleksandroff." Ileanadorff is not a Russian name form.