

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

A Play In One Act

by

Sean Coe

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

© 2025 by Sean Coe

CAUTION: Professionals and Amateurs are hereby warned that performance of **HAND THROUGH THE VEIL** is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of The United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth) and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission of which must be obtained from the Author in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for **HAND THROUGH THE VEIL** are controlled exclusively by Next Stage Press. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance written permission and paying the requisite fee.

SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce **HAND THROUGH THE VEIL** is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author.

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

Hand Through the Veil was first performed at An Die Musik in Baltimore, MD with the following cast:

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.....Doug Krehbel
Harry Houdini.....Terrance Fleming
Mina Crandon.....Ann Turiano

Directed by Chris Cotterman
Designed by April Forrer and Nancy Linden

Special thanks to: Alex Perry, Ann Turiano, Henry Wong, Karin Rosnizeck, Seth Neustein and Lovely Lane Church.

Script note : English translation for the Hungarian is provided in parentheses, not italicized.

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

Cast of Characters

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: Author

Harry Houdini: Magician/Escape Artist

Mina Crandon: Purported Medium

Setting: Somewhere on the east coast.

Time: October 1926.

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

ACT 1 SCENE 1

An empty stage save for a large steamer trunk. It has seen a lot of wear. ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, a tall, stately looking man in his late 60's or so walks on and contemplates the trunk for a moment then sits on it. He begins to speak in an accent that is a quaint mixture of Scottish and formal British.

DOYLE. (*Contemplates audience.*) Damndest thing being trapped by the very thing you created. Had no intention of having Holmes go on and on like that but they kept throwing money at me. And nothing else seemed to stick in the public's mind like he did. Professor Challenger anyone? (*Pause*) Any one? Thought so. Right. So there you have it. My one profitable little monster. That I loathe. Well ... perhaps a bit strong and ungrateful but ... he's not me you know. Based him on a professor of mine. Extraordinary certainly but not me. Scientific, shrewd. LOGICAL. Not sure I could lay claim to any of those at this point. Logical. Logical. Logical. What comfort can that be? One body. One world. A finds B and then C and the dots all connect to Z and then we're done. Although some never get to Z. Stopped at M or I or even B. Why? I don't know but doesn't seem logical so many I loved will never see my Z. Think I may be rounding V about now. There has to be an answer... (*trunk begins to shake and bang*) Oh damn! (*Doyle stands and looks at the trunk with a mixture of awe and fright as the lid bangs open, and out steps HOUDINI clad only in boxers and chains, which he sheds.*) Jesus Harry!

HOUDINI. Doyle! Good to see you ... (*Offers his hand then thinks better of it*) no, no.

DOYLE. What's wrong?

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

HOUDINI. You don't want to know where that hand has been. *(Irritated)* A little too enthusiastic in the hiding. Had to almost dislocate my shoulder to reach it.

DOYLE. I'm afraid to ask.

HOUDINI. *(Grins.)* The pin. Well, well, you'll forgive me but I don't think I will be sitting down for a while. Body cavities are a funny thing. *(Goes offstage still talking, ever the showman until he's not.)* You know last time I performed that I nearly swallowed it and choked, my that would have been a strange autopsy and spoiled it all, but anyway, decide to NOT put it behind ...ah, ah, no although I know *(Returns with pants draped over his shoulder and a chair he plunks down next to Doyle.)* that you long ago figured it out. Sherlock would know it all before I got into the damn thing. Thank goodness he's fiction.

DOYLE. Yes, I suppose.

HOUDINI. *(Puts on pants and addresses audience.)* So, it takes a lot of work to be a good fraud. Magician. Same thing. Really it is except maybe a magician gives you back innocence while a fraud takes it. I read so much *(pulls a book from trunk.)* because, to be Houdini, I have to know everything. About you. *(Right at audience.)* And you and that child who you dragged here when they'd rather be with their friends and YOU! Yes I see you slumping in your seat trying NOT to be noticed. I see you. I know you. Or I could very shortly. We could chat ...5 minutes maybe and *(Points to head.)* right here. But right here as well. *(Points to heart.)* I hope so. *(Points to trunk.)* This trick, ha you won't see it again sooo let me explain. Mind and body. Arms long body short mind sharp, I am built for this. I can dislocate my shoulders at will, reach ...ANYWHERE. Which comes to the next thing. Can you guess? Where I put the pin or key. Sometimes both. *(Leaps into the audience and assumes the position against the stage. Doyle looks mortified but slightly amused.)*

DOYLE. Quite the showman.

HOUDINI. SEARCH ME! *(Pause. Drops his pants.)* Go ahead. It is ...ok. No takers. Well, when I perform this, being locked in a jail cell or in a straitjacket, sometime some combination, one of you would. A pastor, or a mayor or society matron. Then key or pin in mouth. I tape it to the back of my teeth. Other times it goes elsewhere. Like maybe with the police. I

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

have to know where certain people will put their hands. That is what magic is. Knowing where to put the key.

DOYLE. My friend is being modest.

HOUDINI. Never. *(Pants back on)* Modesty pays no bills.

DOYLE. No. He is-

HOUDINI. Not this again. *(Removes pin from pocket.)* Here is my proof! Fraud. Charlatan. Magician. Nothing more.

DOYLE. So you insist.

HOUDINI. *(Offers him pin.)* Here. Keep it. *(Doyle does not take it. Houdini puts pin back in his pocket.)* So Doyle, I have no interest.

DOYLE. Why?

HOUDINI. They are all the same-disappointing.

DOYLE. She won't be I promise. She's like you except she acknowledges her gift. Offers it as a way to help. She isn't-

HOUDINI. Selfish.

DOYLE. I reserve judgement. But please, as my friend or someone who was a friend. Please come with me.

HOUDINI. No. Not for my own amusement or hope; or your pain.

DOYLE. Then I will go alone. I'll give you a full report. *(He leaves and Houdini watches him.)*

HOUDINI. *(To audience.)* That old man want to be tricked so badly. Whoever she is ...it won't take much: a ringing of a bell, a strange voice that he wants to recognize. And she will run through the whole alphabet finding a name he will know. "I am getting a P, as in Paul maybe Pal. No? What about Peter? Oh he isn't speaking very loudly, perhaps it's not a P but B, oh what did you say? Who called you pal? Yes, I am getting a southern accent. An old friend, oh isn't that nice he stopped by for a visit. You weren't really close, you found him rather rude? Well, I think he has come to apologize." If he is lucky or she is especially talented, then a few objects in the room may get thrown about courtesy of an accomplice or her foot working a string as she shakes in the throes of possession. Entertaining him, teasing, never giving what he really wants, but enough so there will be a next time. *(Beat.)* Of course I'm going. *(Fade to dark.)*

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

SCENE 2

The stage is totally dark. Then, from what seems like far backstage, we see a small white light. It moves toward us, floating with a will of its own. Then, finally, we see Houdini dressed in all black except for his shirt and a diamond stickpin. He looks- what's a good old- fashioned word? Natty. Spiffy. He carries a ghost light. almost reverently, until he reaches center stage and sets it down. .

HOUDINI. *(Kneeling.)* Oh Baphomet my dark lord. My master, I plead with thee to hear thy apt pupil and gift me with thy presence. I summon in the name of all the shadows and damned souls who lurk here. I offer much for a glimpse of your foul divinity. *(A faint breeze. Is this a response?)* I feel you. Yes, come to me my master. I kneel for you. Show me thy face and then take my eyes for I will no longer need to see. *(Wind increases.)* He is coming! I hear you in the name of Beelzebub and Gader'ell and ... Mammon and ... Nebuchadnezzar. I am a child, master. Your child. Lift me in your arms. Carry me Father. *(He raises his arms like a child asking to be picked up and stands. Slowly his feet leave the ground.)* Yes! Yes! Further! LET ME SEE YOUR FACE! *(Light flashes-could that be thunder?)* I can offer much! I have a sacrifice. I HAVE THEM. *(Points at the audience.)* TAKE THEM! *(He rises further and then with a grin begins to twirl. The twirl is slow. He seems irritated.)* All right that's enough. *(Lights come up and we see the wires and the fans blowing. He is lowered and unhitches himself.)* Nebuchadnezzar? That would never do in an actual performance. Went blank there for a second. Getting old and rusty and not really mine. Just a little demonstration, with apologies to that great Scottish faker Daniel Dunglas Home. *(A stagehand appears with a wig and glasses which Houdini puts on and adjusts.)* Levitation was a specialty of his. They all have their specialties. Ectoplasm, levitation, some keep it simple with a cold read. I knew one particularly fond of ectoplasm who had it shoot out of certain ...orifices, on occasion. We shall see. *(As if rehearsing.)* I AM HOUDINI AND YOU ARE A FRAUD! *(Satisfied, he turns around, picks up the ghost light and walks back the way he came. Stage goes dark as we follow the bobbing light.)*

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

SCENE 3

A small, fairly drab hotel room. Doyle is seated on a loveseat that is RC. At center stage is a round dining table and DR is a small night table with drawer. He speaks as MINA CRANDON paces. Lithe in mind, body and spirit.

DOYLE. So, I think I may have piqued his interest. Enough anyway.

MINA. May?

DOYLE. Well can't be certain, it's been a while-

MINA. FUUUUCK!

DOYLE. -No, He'll have to think-

MINA, Fuck!

DOYLE. LANGUAGE!

MINA. FUCK, FUCK, FUCKITY, FUCK, FUCK-

DOYLE. I will go.

MINA. Bye FUCKER! *(He stands. She pushes him back down and cups his face in her hands.)* I need him here.

DOYLE. I think he will be. *(Tries to remove her hands.)* Let's dispense with this.

MINA. What?

DOYLE. Seduction. Totally unnecessary.

MINA. SEDUCTION! This isn't seduction. It's ...VAMPING. This is vamping.

DOYLE. The difference?

MINA. Well, not to make you blush, but if this were seduction I wouldn't be touching your face. *(He blushes.)* Ha! You're so easy. Vamping is like hypnotism.

DOYLE. No need to vamp.

MINA. It can be fun.

DOYLE. STOP! *(Removes her hands.)* Come sit with me. *(She does.)* I promise you that I will get him here. If not today, then I'll try again.

MINA. I don't have that kind of time. I told Le Roi I'd be back in a few days. Lately he's been like a man evicted from a mirage, forced to wander the desert. Lost because of me, lost without me.

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

DOYLE. He told me no. Didn't tell him it was you of course, but he can't resist a debunking, a chance to humiliate. So, I'm almost sure.

MINA. Except he won't this time. Not that he did then. He was sure.

DOYLE. When he comes can you promise no embellishments?

MINA. That's the whole point right? That I don't need that. I am so fucking gifted this ... whatever it is will be enough. But you know it never is. People always want more. More than I can give, more than they have any right to. They all want the same thing: comfort-with a show of course. Comfort with a side dish of spirit goo.

DOYLE. Even if those manifestations were true, I have always found them a bit vulgar. Surely those in the afterlife find the value in discretion.

MINA. Why the hell do you think it's so difficult? They have no manners at all. Like a bunch of fucking children all rushing to the podium at once. Discretion? They do, say anything-some of it filthy, horrible. I'm the podium. Have no say who speaks.

DOYLE. Walter then.

MINA. Yes. And you know he favors the rude ones. Finds them more interesting. And how the hell do I know if that is Aunt Sylvia or not? He's always playing tricks. I filter as best I can but he's in charge.

DOYLE. I am afraid Harry won't buy any of that. So, Walter needs to be on his best behavior. You're giving him a voice, all of them a chance to talk. You have to be the one in control.

MINA. You really don't understand any of this do you? If I was in control don't you think I would have provided your son?

DOYLE. (*Beat.*) I never asked-

MINA. Yes. Which is exactly why I wanted to give him to you. Not once. That's what I mean. I can't control who comes through. I know you hoped.

DOYLE. Probably my fault. Perhaps I should have asked. Always seemed to be somebody more desperate at the table. Maybe he just doesn't want to see me. But look, when Harry comes I think I should do the talking, unless there is some sort of appeal you wish to make.

MINA. I'd like to tell the son of a bitch to fuck off.

DOYLE. So there it is. You go into the bedroom until he and I have talked.

MINA. I'd love to hear what you have to say.

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

DOYLE. Between him and me. *(She gets up and starts to pace.)*

MINA. I hate this. You interceding for me.

DOYLE. I don't mind.

MINA. YES YOU DO! Your jaw sets in this odd way and your teeth grind every time you talk about him.

DOYLE. I never noticed.

MINA. I want to bite my tongue in two rather than speak his name.

(Thoughts racing.) Being put on a pedestal sure beats wallowing in the gutter. It was nice up there. I don't mean worshiped-that's rather annoying. Or even admired ...that can be dull. Just to be noticed for something important.

DOYLE. *(He really does.)* I completely understand.

MINA. Speaking of worshiped-he certainly doesn't mind it. The instant he arrived all those men turned into little boys. I think I heard a couple even giggle. OR WORSE-like slobbering puppies, drooling, waiting for a pat on the head! I went from belle of the ball to their crazy, smelly aunt, who carries cats in her purse, in a matter of seconds. They agreed to anything he wanted. "Can Mr. Crandon sit over there? Good. I'd like to have Mrs. Crandon in this box-" Strapping me in a damn chair like I was a criminal to be executed! Walter wanted none of it. *(She abruptly goes to a drawer, pulls out some candles, and then retrieves a lace table cloth which she spreads on the small circular dining table.)* Let's practice.

DOYLE. What?

MINA. Let me take another stab at bringing you Kingsley.

DOYLE. Honestly think that's up to him. No offense, but can't imagine you or your kind, how few or many are the only avenue available. You know I take naps, not because I lack vigor or am old, though I am. I hope to dream. Of him. Once. Not a damn memory, have those fading, yellowing, but a dream, Maybe playing cricket or watching a game of football. Not talking, just being together again. Once thought I saw him when I went skiing. Flying down the hill and then out of the corner of my eye I saw a shadow and then spilled. Bye the time I got up, whatever was gone. Like to think he was looking out. Wishful thinking and the sun I suppose conspiring against me, but felt a kind of joy the rest of the day.

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

MINA. I'll bet it was him *(He shrugs.)* They like it when you think of them. Not all the time but like anyone they don't want to be forgotten. Come on. Sit down and focus. *(She dims the light.)* Don't be afraid Arthur. *(Holds out hands.)* Sit. *(He reluctantly sits and takes her hands.)*

DOYLE. I won't blame you if nothing happens-

MINA. Be positive Arthur. Help me. *(They are silent. 5 seconds. 10 seconds. The room seems to grow darker. She relaxes. Breathing becomes slow.)* Walter. Walter, I need you. I have someone here who dearly wishes to speak to one who has crossed over. Walter, do you hear me? *(Nothing. Seconds go by.)* Walter? *(Tick. Tock.)* WALTER!

MINA. *(Walter.)* JUST A SECOND! What am I at your beck and call? *(This is Walter. The voice is just a bit deeper, not a male voice.)*

MINA. THANK YOU! *(Walter takes his time.)* Jesus!

MINA. *(Walter.)* Ain't seen him. Crossed over? What do you ...who's that with you? I recognize him. He's been here before.

DOYLE. Yes, it's Conan Doyle my ...er friend.

MINA. Sssh.

MINA. *(Walter.)* Bit worse for wear since the last time I saw you. Still always an honor. Mina, it's been a while. What dooo yooou want? Shit! Shit!

MINA. What?

MINA. *(Child.)* Wo ist meine Mutter? Wo ist meine Mutter?!

MINA. *(Walter.)* Verschwinde! Get out of here! Can't help you. Ich kann dir nicht helfen.

MINA. Walter, who is that? Don't be mean!

MINA. *(Walter.)* Some kid. There's always one . Don't know what is going on.

MINA. *(Child.)* Bitte! Bitte! Wo bin ich?-

MINA. *(Walter.)* Ich kann dir nicht helfen!

MINA. *(Child.)* Bitte! Ich habe Angst!

MINA. *(Walter.)* You're in hell, all right! Du bist in Der Hölle

ARTHUR. IF I MAY! *(Very grandfatherly.)* Kannst du mich hören, kleiner Junge? Kannst du mich hören? Hab' keine Angst. *(Beat.)*

MINA. *(Child.)* Wer bist du?

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

DOYLE. Ein freund. Kannst du mich sehen? Walter let him come. Kannst du mich sehen?

MINA. *(Child.)* Nein.

DOYLE. Schau genau. Kannst du mich jetzt sehen? *(Beat.)*

MINA. *(Child.)* Ja. Ich sehe dich ein bisschen. Du bist alt!

DOYLE. *(Laughs.)* Ja das stimmt, ich bin sehr alt.

MINA. *(Child.)* Nicht so alt wie mein Großvater aber viel älter als mein Vater.

DOYLE. Wie heisst Du? *(No answer.)* Hallo, ich wuerde gerne deinen Namen wissen. *(Beat.)*

MINA. *(Child.)* Peter. Und wie heisst Du?

DOYLE. Arthur. Freut mich, Sie kennenzulernen.

MINA. *(Child.)* Arthur kannst du mir helfen? Ich habe mich verirrt und möchte nach Hause gehen.

DOYLE.

Hab keine Angst. Kannst Du eine Frage beantworten?

MINA. *(Child.)* Was?

DOYLE. Wo sind deine Eltern? Deine Großeltern?

MINA. *(Child.)* Meine Eltern essen zu Abend und meine Großeltern leben weit weg. Oh, mein Großvater Johann ist tot.

DOYLE. Erzähl mir von ihm.

MINA. *(Child.)* Warum?

DOYLE. War er wie ich?

MINA. *(Child.)* Kein bart. Er war sehr groß und ahte diesen Hund namens Willie. Er ist auch tot.

DOYLE. Peter, kannst du an Großvater und Willie denken? Stell sie Dir in Deinem Kopf vor und denke Sie wirklich über sie nach.

MINA. *(Child.)* Ja, aber warum?

DOYLE. Bitte. Ich werde dir helfen.

MINA. *(Child.)* Wie soll mir das helfen? *(Beat)* Also gut, ich stelle sie mir jetzt vor.

DOYLE. Gut. Kanst du sie sehen?

MINA. *(Child.)* Nein.

DOYLE. Versuche es weiter ! *(Long Beat.)*

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

MINA. *(Child.)* Warte! Ich höre Willie! *(There is a loud knock on the door.)*

ARTHUR. Peter, kannst Du-*(Another knock.)*

MINA. *(Child.)* Arthur, Ich sehe Willie-

HOUDINI'S VOICE. Hello. Doyle?

MINA. I am losing them! Walter!

MINA. *(Walter.)* You're fading.

MINA. The boy-

ARTHUR. *(Desperate.)* Peter do you see-

MINA. Gone. All gone.

HOUDINI. *(Enters wearing wig and glasses.)* Mina? Or is it Margery? Doyle?

MINA. *(Not missing a beat.)* I AM MINA, AND YOU ARE AN ASSHOLE. *(Blackout.)*

SCENE 4

A few minutes later. While not exactly blocking the door, Doyle stands in front of it. Houdini is throwing away his disguise.

DOYLE. I'd forgotten your love of incognito.

HOUDINI. The element of surprise is as important, or more so, in detection as it is in magic. *(Referring to Mina.)* You should know I hate repeating myself.

DOYLE. You do the same acts all the time on tour-

HOUDINI. People come to see me because the result could be different. Each night I know it could be different. This will be the same-come on, you're coming with me!

DOYLE. How's that?

HOUDINI. You're retracing your steps. Lost. You've nothing new to offer. Our fight is done. If it's any consolation I'm not enjoying the victory much.

DOYLE. What victory? I've assumed this was a mutual search that led us to divergent paths. At least despite your best efforts, I've tried to see it that way.

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

HOUDINI. Dead end old man. How do I explain this to you? Since I was a boy and crawled under carnival tents with my brother I've seen these people work. I LEARNED FROM THEM. In some ways I am-but I could never use someone's grief against them. I have felt that pain too severely.

We are supposed to miss

people, Doyle. It is a way we measure how much they mean to us.

DOYLE. But when we met you talked with such enthusiasm-

HOUDINI. Hope is a stupid thing. Sometimes it has to be beaten before it gets the message. And ... I was a fan.

DOYLE. Oh no.

HOUDINI. A man of letters who invented this incredible character-I read several stories! My one doubt of myself is my education; the way I speak, write-and you were not a snob who thought of me as only an entertainer, you were kind. This educated man wanted to talk to me. When you spoke of spiritualism I wanted to believe. You spoke with such passion about it I wanted to.. maybe really for the first time.

DOYLE. Well, I know what changed that-

HOUDINI. Yes. That. But there were other things before. And I knew that because I am Houdini I could see things you could not. But ...it was as if being deceived did not bother you. You had to know on occasion! I was faced with the choice of either my friend is a fool or helping them.

DOYLE. Maybe both.

HOUDINI. Leave with me. I cannot promise how things will be between us. But your legacy is important. We have no business thinking about an afterlife. It gives us excuses and gets in the way. Better to believe it all ends here.

DOYLE. (*Rueful smile.*) You've been a terrible partner to Death, Harry. You've used him in your act, cheated him of his due, and now diminish him by implying he has dominion over nothing but clay turning to dust.

HOUDINI. If we actually meet, I'll be sure to apologize. (*They laugh. It seems*

to surprise them that they still could.)

DOYLE. (*Almost afraid to break the moment.*) I can't leave.

HOUDINI. Why?

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

DOYLE. My journey began with betraying my father and as it nears its end I seek to redeem myself with one so much like him.

HOUDINI. I don't understand.

DOYLE. With all the loss, the wars, I knew there had to be answers that conventional thought could not provide. I felt like an explorer, sailing to the unknown. There were setbacks. I was polite and moved on. Wasn't interested in fighting but in discovery. And there were glimpses, moments, enough to keep me going. Finally one day, I found myself staring at one of my father's paintings hung patronizingly in my office.

HOUDINI. You showed me his paintings. They were strange but very beautiful.

DOYLE. Ghosts and demons and fairies, drawn with an intimate knowledge that my younger self had refused to see ...he used to send me drawings asking, "is this the work of a madman?"

HOUDINI. I must ask what this has to do with Mina Crandon?

DOYLE. My father was scorned and imprisoned for his gift. He could not control what he saw any more than Mina can guarantee who or what speaks through her. The talent is wild and flawed and must be protected.

HOUDINI. From me?

DOYLE. From me. The way I was. I have always suspected you share their talent but have only allowed it to peek out now and then, afraid that if released it would turn against you.

HOUDINI. And I have said you were wrong. I have worked very hard with no assistance from another realm. *(Pause.)* Well, I will leave you to your grifter's paradise. Enjoy. *(He moves toward the door and Doyle blocks him.)* So now you're blocking the door? Very nice. And what, I'm not going to get by? Stand aside, I'm leaving.

DOYLE. *(Weary.)* Just let me finish.

HOUDINI. It was all finished. She was finished last year. I saw her act. Act. That is what it was. Nothing different. A few well executed tricks. I see magicians hat in hand, starving, who are as good. As for you and I-

DOYLE. Well that's where I should have started isn't it? You and I. First of all, I owe you an apology. Through all the back and forth, letters, public attacks-

HOUDINI. I apologize for nothing.

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

DOYLE. No, you did nothing so why should you. I suppose attacking my wife was in your eyes totally correct.

HOUDINI. She deceived me.

DOYLE. Yes she did. I will never know what exactly possessed her except a genuine attempt to give you comfort.

HOUDINI. My mother. She said it was my mother.

DOYLE. She had the best intention for the right reason. Totally wrong. Misguided. I love her, Harry, but I have been dealing with this mania of hers for years. She believes it so fervently. She and Phineas-

HOUDINI. How is he?

DOYLE. Aligned almost precisely with her wishes. It's a bit of a game. Where should we vacation, England or South of France? Oh, well, seems Phineas thinks it's imperative that we spend time with her mother. The whole house is run by him. Can't have dinner without a séance to let cook know what to serve.

HOUDINI. So why am I here when even you don't believe?

DOYLE. I didn't say that. I am here because it is my fault you don't believe, a burden I wish to disappear. The man I first met approached everything with a childlike hope. You seemed sure like I was, am, that there is a thin divide between this world and the next and somewhere a hand that can reach through and connect us. WE, my wife and I took that away from you. Not Mina.

HOUDINI. She isn't worth that last scrap of faith old man. I staked my reputation, and I was right. They were ready to give her the prize money but all I needed was two sessions.

MINA. (*Appearing from the bedroom.*) You know the money meant nothing? Le Roi takes care of that side of things. 2,500? Please. Drop in the bucket compared to what I could get. I could make more than you. I've never taken a dime for anything.

DOYLE. Not his point I think-

MINA. No. It's mine. His ego couldn't take someone becoming more famous.

HOUDINI. I have wished a long time to meet a natural. For that person I would step aside. I am all craft. But no such person exists. As you can see I

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

still exist despite your curse. It's been over a year since you told me I'd be dead soon.

MINA. Well I wasn't exact about it. Sentiment hasn't changed.

HOUDINI. That, you're honest about-good. So you hate me, I despise you (*Turning to Doyle.*) and we have said all we need to.

MINA. Whatever conditions you want I'll agree to. Name them.

HOUDINI. No.

DOYLE. You know Harry, from what I heard, you didn't really convince the panel. Planted the seed of doubt but convinced ...bit strong. A couple of them felt you had a strong bias.

HOUDINI. Of course, I did and it was justified-

DOYLE & MINA. JUSTIFIED!

MINA. YOU planted that ruler!

HOUDINI. (*Tries to push past Doyle.*) No Madame. You were careless.

MINA. Any conditions. Test me magician. If you catch me, no better, if you don't find me genuine, I'll go on your little radio show and denounce myself as a fraud. Hell, half the world already thinks so. Oh and I'll be sure to say Great and Houdini at least 4 or 5 times while I am there. Want me to sign something. I will. But what will you give me if you can't prove it?

HOUDINI. I don't have to prove anything. You do. Beyond a shadow of my doubt.

MINA. What then?

HOUDINI. I will say I was wrong. Withdraw from public life.

DOYLE. On the radio? An admission?

HOUDINI. I will say I was wrong.

MINA. Done! Shall we get started?

HOUDINI. Not so fast Madame. It occurs to me that our wagers are not even. My reputation against yours?

MINA. So money is-

HOUDINI. I need a bigger fish. (*Looks at Doyle.*) What do you say? Will you back your artifact?

DOYLE. What are you asking ... precisely?

MINA. This is between you and me-

HAND THROUGH THE VEIL

HOUDINI. You win, Doyle, she somehow proves to me ...I will do what I said. I win; you accompany me on the last few stops of my tour. You will be part of my act and admit Mrs. Crandon and all her kind as frauds, and denounce spiritualism. Do we have a deal?

DOYLE. You've had this in mind a while I think.

HOUDINI. No. But I am one to seize an opportunity. *(Beat.)*

MINA. SAY YES! I'm neither noble nor unselfish. I've never wanted to hear yes more in all my life.

DOYLE. Well then. Yes. I accept. Let's proceed. *(Houdini takes his jacket off. Doyle slowly takes a chair and Mina goes back into the bedroom. Slow fade to dark.)*

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
ORDER A COPY AT WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.COM***