

To the Editor, New York Times,

In my round-the-world trip in 1908, I discovered a lone white man stored away on one of the Solomon Islands group, at which place a vessel only stops about three times a year for trading purposes, also bringing fresh provisions. He is far away from civilization, the only white man among the natives. They know nothing about money. They gather cocoanuts to trade for beads, matches, twine, knives, &c. The heat is so intense that they only work a few hours daily.

My friend writes that he is tired of all this, and hankers after something to read. I have already mailed him reading material but thought if a letter were published, some of your readers would send him some of their papers or magazines. His name and address: H.M. Markham, Morovo Lagoon, British Solomon Islands via Australia.

HARRY HOUDINI

Brooklyn, N.Y. Sept. 18, 1916

I register tomorrow for enlisting.
Hurrah, now I am one of the boys.

Harry Handcuff Houdini
Scholar of the Occult
Weak left hand
Blue
Black
Jew
Has person lost arm, leg, hand, eye?
Mother

Suspended by my ankles
in a strait-jacket
from some high building,
I extricate myself
in mid air.

While they put the jacket on,
I square my shoulders
and distend my chest
like a cunning horse.

Once I am hanging
safely above their fear
and they are safely
unable to hear the cost,
I dislocate both shoulders.

With my hands still enclosed
in the sleeves of the jacket,
I reach up my back
and fumble the back
buckles loose.

Then I am entirely free.

In February 1916, an explosion in a tunnel under the East River blew four workmen up through twenty feet of river silt, up through the river itself, and forty feet into the air on the crest of a geyser.

One man, Marshall Mabey, survived.

It is said that Houdini visited Mabey in hospital the next day, pushed past the man's wife and sons gathered around his bed, and spoke to Mabey through his bandages.

It is also said that Mabey's sons threw Houdini out of the room.

*I need to know how it felt
to pass through earth and water,
and what you did, as you travelled,
to survive.*

*You must have done something.
Please! Tell me what you did!*

It is true. I love all acts
without speech.

The seed the breath the breast
the giving and the holding;

the semaphore of arms and legs.

For mendacity

a man enters from behind.

For times of imminent departure

he snarls and brushes away the soft hand.

A man could spit on his partner's back.

When she turns he could discharge himself in her face.

All words unsaid I love with desperation.

One day, while writing about Houdini, it came to me to put on a black plastic carnival mask from the two-dollar shop, and look at myself in the mirror. Green glitter rose in spikes around my eyes, and in the middle of my forehead, a red jewel glowed.

It's not that by wearing a black mask I saw Houdini, or even that I detected his presence, as some people say they smell a snake before they see it. I just knew that I had found his sort of place.

I made up my mind to cruise the back streets of this place, and wait. To stand in any crowd, in alleys and doorways, at the back of theatres, and wait for the moment when he would come charging round a corner, talking loudly to anyone who would listen.

Late at night in my house on the hill, I would also listen for heartbeats, sighs and curling things he might say softly to himself for comfort. I might add a murmur of my own.