

The Return of the Davenports

by

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## ACT I

## SCENE 1

*An auditorium. At the back of the stage is a 'spirit cabinet' with three doors on the front.*

*To stage right is a lectern, which faces the audience. In the centre of the stage there is a table with two chairs at either side. On top of the table is a small pile of books, props for magic tricks including a writing slate, a carafe of water and a glass.*

*Houdini enters. He is wearing the traditional evening attire of the stage magician.*

**HOUDINI:** Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen! Welcome to this evening's entertainment! I hope it will be to your taste and satisfaction.

*Houdini performs a couple of slight-of-hand tricks.*

**HOUDINI:** This isn't really me, you know. This sleight-of-hand business, I mean. The Grand Illusion has always been my thing: I could escape from a sealed container--underwater! I could make a living elephant vanish into thin air! But it's tricky to bring an elephant on tour to...

*(looks around enquiringly).*

You know, I am sure I have been here before. In... was it 1903? And again in 1911. I remember I wrote to the local papers, complaining that someone round here had checked into three hotels under the name of Houdini. The thought of a free hotel room at my expense gave my shows quite a boost around here. You've got to understand your audience.

*Houdini walks towards the spirit cabinet.*

1911! That was the year Ira Davenport died. Ira Davenport. The Brothers Davenport! Ira and William. Renowned practitioners of the dark séance! Some believed they were powerful psychics. They were thought capable of raising the spirits of the dead--and persuading them to entertain audiences at five shillings a seat.

William died before I was born. But I knew Ira. He was an old man then. He didn't pull in crowds any more. But he showed me his 'trade secret' *(He pats the spirit cabinet)*. "Houdini," he said, "we started it, now you finish it." I took the lesson to heart, let me tell you.

The way it worked was like this: Ira and William would take their seats inside the cabinet. *(As Houdini is describing this he opens the spirit cabinet doors and takes a seat inside the right hand compartment)* Then the doors would be closed. Then, to the astonishment of the audience, strange noises would be heard from within! *(Houdini picks up a ukulele and plucks it)* Objects would appear through openings in the cabinet.

*(looks around enquiringly). (cont'd)* Did I mention that, all the time this was happening, they were tied up by their hands and feet?

You might think this was just an escapology act decked out in mystical garb. No matter. Such scepticism makes no impact upon certain brilliant minds. Regarding which, I give you exhibit A, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

*Houdini closes the cabinet door on himself.*

## ACT I

## SCENE 2

*Doyle enters from stage left, crossing the stage to the lectern. He is wearing a tweed suit and a pair of round, wire-framed spectacles. He has a walrus moustache and appears to be around sixty years old. As he passes the table Doyle picks up one of the books, The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes. He pours water from the carafe into the glass, takes a sip, and places the glass on top of the lectern.*

**DOYLE:**                   **(Genially)** There are two things that people always want to ask me. One of them is: how did I come to write the Sherlock Holmes stories? And the other is about how I came to have psychic experiences and to take so much interest in that question. Well, first of all, about the Sherlock Holmes stories. I was a young doctor, I had a scientific training, and I used occasionally to read detective stories. But it annoyed me how in the old-fashioned detective story the detective always seemed to get at his results by some sort of fluke. That didn't seem to me quite playing the game. It seemed to me that he's bound to give his reasons why he came to his conclusions. And so I began to think of turning scientific methods onto the work of detection. As a medical student I had a professor who was extraordinarily quick at deduction. After examining a patient he would diagnose the disease, and also very often the patient's nationality, occupation and other points, entirely by his power of observation. So I thought to myself, if my old professor came into the detective business, he wouldn't do things by chance; he'd solve the mystery by building it up, scientifically. I began writing stories in this way and, after a time, people began to recognise that there was something different from the old-stye detective. Sherlock Holmes prospered (*Doyle holds up The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes to the audience*) and so I may say did I. We both came along together. The curious thing is how many people around the world are perfectly convinced that he is a living human being. I get letters addressed to him, I get letters asking for his autograph, I get letters addressed to his rather stupid friend, Watson, I've even had ladies writing to say that they'd be very glad to act as his housekeeper.

*Doyle replaces The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes on the table. At the same time the spirit cabinet door opens to reveal **Houdini** bound by ostentatiously thick ropes.*

**DOYLE:**                   The other question, about my interest in psychic matters, is of course a much more serious one. Curiously enough my first experiences in that direction were just about the time when Sherlock Holmes was being built up in my mind. That would be about the year 1886. So nobody can say that I've formed my opinions very hastily. I suppose I've sat with more mediums good, and bad, and indifferent than perhaps any living being. Anyhow, a larger variety because I've traveled so much all over the world.

**DOYLE (cont'd):** So when I talk on this subject I'm not talking about what I believe, I'm not talking about what I think, I'm talking about what I *know*, about things that I've handled, that I've seen, that I've heard with my own ears.

*The spirit cabinet door closes and then opens a few moments later to reveal **Houdini** free of his bonds. While this is taking place **Doyle** takes another sip of water. **Houdini** emerges from the spirit cabinet and walks down the stage towards **Doyle**.*

**DOYLE:** Whenever I meet a sceptic I tell them that I look forward to our meeting in the Great Hereafter, when I can greet them as an old friend.

**HOUDINI:** Well, here I am, old friend.

**DOYLE:** And I will take great pleasure in asking them “well, what do you say now?”

**HOUDINI:** Well, what *you* say? I never said I didn't believe in ghosts. Only the charlatans who speak on our behalf.

**DOYLE:** Of course, I am not alone in having such psychic experiences. (*Doyle picks up a black notebook from the table and holds it up to the audience*)

**HOUDINI:** He never had a psychic experience in his life that wasn't produced by some conjuring trick or act of self-delusion.

**DOYLE:** I have in this little book the names of one hundred and sixty people of high distinction, including over forty professors, who will swear they have communicated with intelligences upon the Other Side.

**HOUDINI :** Their names?

**DOYLE:** Professor Crookes, Professor Barrett, Professor Lodge, Professor Challis. Many others. I could go on--these are just from memory. They too have witnessed psychic phenomena. And they have evaluated them scientifically.

**HOUDINI:** They are no more qualified to identify an illusion than a conjuror is to teach chemistry!

**DOYLE:** From the beginning, we Spiritualists have welcomed scientific investigation. The Davenport brothers proved beyond question that they could summon spirits. These spirits moved solid objects and played musical instruments! And all the while the Davenports were bound hand and foot, closely observed by several professors of Harvard University, who detected no trickery.

**HOUDINI:** The vanity of clever men makes them the easiest to deceive.

**DOYLE:** When the Davenport brothers came to London, they performed for an audience of the highest distinction including Viscount Bury, M.P.; the Chancellor of the University of Sydney; and Captain Inglefield, the Arctic explorer.

**HOUDINI:** Oh, an Arctic explorer!

*Houdini gets back inside the cabinet and closes the door.*

**DOYLE:** Each of these notable men agreed they could detect no trace of trickery in any form. William and Ira Davenport were firmly bound by ropes and, in that condition. Inhuman sounds emanated from within the cabinet that the brothers could not possibly have been responsible for. Tambourines and other instruments were struck, ghostly hands appeared at the openings (*Houdini waves through the opening*). And when the cabinet doors were opened the brothers were found safe in their seats, bound hand and foot as before. On one occasion, a newspaper reporter was severely struck in the face by a guitar, his brow being cut, as it floated in the ether.

*The ukulele is tossed from the door. Doyle does not react to the noise. He replaces the notebook on the table and continues to address the audience from centre stage.*

**DOYLE:** However, it is a sad reflection that the Davenports — probably the greatest mediums of their kind that the world has ever seen — suffered from brutal persecution. Many times they were in danger of their lives. When the Davenport brothers came to the English provinces, for example, they met with tremendous prejudice and hostility.

*Houdini steps out again and casually strolls downstage, observing Doyle.*

**DOYLE:** They were the victims of anti-American prejudice and abused as if they were selling snake oil. During a performance at Liverpool they were violently assaulted and forced to flee the stage. In their absence, the baying mob vented its fury upon the spirit cabinet itself. A similar outrage was committed a few days later during an attempted performance here, in Huddersfield.

**HOUDINI:** (*Smacks his forehead*) Huddersfield!

**DOYLE:** And these attacks were somehow claimed as a victory for reason and common sense!

**HOUDINI:** That truly was a bad audience.

**DOYLE:** The Davenport brothers may have used certain artificial means to *amplify* the spirits, as it were. To give the performance some ‘razzamatazz,’ as the Americans say, and so aid the *commercialisation* of their psychic power. It is regrettable, of course. But such is the modern world.

- HOUDINI:** The Davenports had razzamatazz.
- DOYLE:** But there can be no question at all, to anyone who has really weighed the facts, that Ira Davenport was a true medium.
- HOUDINI:** He certainly didn't need psychic powers to escape from those ropes!
- DOYLE:** He had no need to pretend. It is obvious that the Davenports could at any time, by announcing themselves as illusionists and doing their performances as conjuring tricks, have won fools and fortune.
- HOUDINI:** Oh! I see where this is going!
- DOYLE:** They were hunted off the stage because of their claim to psychic powers. Houdini knew this, of course. His own powers were drawn from that same psychic source. And he knew that if he were to avoid a similar fate to the Davenports, no one could know his secret. He had to pretend *not* to be psychic.
- HOUDINI:** And black is white, and up is down!
- DOYLE:** But *his* abilities far exceeded those of the Davenport brothers, and so his denial had to be all the more strenuous. Ropes might have been made of jelly, so easily did his limbs pass through them.
- HOUDINI:** *(Pleased)* Ah yes!
- DOYLE:** On December 2nd, 1906, Houdini leaped from the Old Belle Isle Bridge at Detroit heavily handcuffed, and miraculously released himself under water so icy cold it would paralyse any man's limbs.
- HOUDINI:** So you might think.
- DOYLE:** On August 26th, 1907, he was thrown into San Francisco Bay with his hands tied behind his back and seventy-five pounds of ball and chain attached to his body. He was resurrected from the sea none the worse. Houdini was manacled, tied up in a box, and dropped into the East River at New York, but somehow lived to tell the tale.
- HOUDINI:** *(Houdini performs another sleight of hand trick to the audience)*  
People notice only what I desire them to see...
- DOYLE:** Are we children, that we should believe such things can be done by a mere knack with locks and knots? Is it not obvious that Houdini was himself the most powerful medium the modern world has known?
- HOUDINI:** Are those the only choices?
- DOYLE:** He was the most curious and intriguing character I ever encountered. I have met better men, and I have certainly met very many worse ones.

- DOYLE (cont'd):** But I have never met a man who had such strange contrasts in his nature, and whose actions and motives it was more difficult to foresee or understand. He was without question a man of tremendous courage--and, I am bound to say, recklessness. He told me he heard a voice that told him what to do and how to do it. So long as he obeyed the voice he was assured of safety.
- HOUDINI:** I remember standing there before a jump, swallowing the yellow stuff that every man has in him. Then at last I would hear the voice and jump. One time I didn't wait for the voice. I nearly broke my neck.
- DOYLE:** I wrote to him in 1923, after the tragic incident of the so-called 'Human Fly,' who fell ten stories during some daredevil stunt.
- HOUDINI:** "Is it worth it?," he asked me. What kind of a question is that to put to an illusionist?
- DOYLE:** Be that as it may, I hope that tonight we have the opportunity to redeem this shameful history as we attempt to summon the Brothers Davenport back to Huddersfield. Which brings me to the main purpose of this evening's gathering and beckons me to welcome to the platform my good friend and assistant in psychic matters, Miss Delicia Freeman.



## ACT I

## SCENE 3

*Freeman enters and takes a seat at the table.*

**DOYLE:** Good evening and welcome, Miss Freeman.

**FREEMAN:** Good evening, Sir Arthur; ladies and gentlemen.

**HOUDINI:** Well here's a fine example.

**DOYLE:** Miss Freeman has kindly agreed to assist me in tonight's séance. She has already been of considerable assistance in my investigations of supernormal photographs. Nature does not lie to the camera, of course, which has in recent years captured many unmistakable images of spirit manifestations. And it was Miss Freeman who first drew my attention to those photographs of fairy life which have so stirred the public imagination.

**FREEMAN:** Some scoffed at these pictures, of course.

**DOYLE:** Indeed.

**FREEMAN:** Some even painted you as a gullible fool, did they not, Sir Arthur?

**DOYLE:** Quite so. Quite so.

**FREEMAN:** But I believe you are the wisest of men. You know the truth when it is revealed, do you not?

**DOYLE:** I like to think so, Miss Freeman. I pride myself on my ability to judge character. Nor do I shrink from mockery. It is the ordeal by which faith is tried, and from which it emerges noble and true.

**FREEMAN:** It's an admirable sentiment.

**DOYLE:** And how could I deny my fellow creatures foreknowledge of the sweet reunion between parent and child that surely awaits us all? For that, I could bear anything.

**FREEMAN:** I feel sure of it, Sir Arthur.

**DOYLE:** I trust this arrangement will be suitable for our séance this evening?

**FREEMAN:** Most assuredly. In fact, I sense a presence here among us already this evening. Do you also feel it, Sir Arthur?

**HOUDINI:** Oh, hello! (*Houdini waves a hand in front of her face*). (*To the audience*) Cold reading. Guesswork amplified by cunning. (*To Freeman*) Now tell him it's someone who has been in his mind a lot of late.

- DOYLE:** Perhaps I do feel something. I thought for a moment just now I sensed a familiar presence while I was speaking of Houdini.
- FREEMAN:** Possibly. Are there any departed friends or loved ones you have been thinking about a lot recently?
- DOYLE:** So many. My brother. My brother-in-law. My son. My first wife. Alas, my life has given me such loves and such losses. And yet I have had little in the way of direct psychic experiences of my own. I am, I fear, too tough an old bird to be truly sensitive as you are, dear Miss Freeman. I must rely on you to guide the voices to me. I have no spiritual gifts myself and none of that psychic atmosphere which gives a tinge of romance to others' lives.
- HOUDINI:** Romance is right!
- FREEMAN:** Tell me, this place. Does it have meaning for you. This hall feels like a vessel of painful memories.
- DOYLE:** Do you sense echoes of the past? A voice, perhaps?
- FREEMAN:** More of a feeling... of being... *restrained*. But also a commotion. A memory of violence and shame.
- DOYLE:** It was in this very place that the Davenports were hounded from the stage pursued by mockery and blows.
- FREEMAN:** They were persecuted for their psychic powers.
- DOYLE:** My onetime friend, Houdini, knew Ira Davenport personally. He insisted that Ira denied he ever claimed to be a medium. But Houdini showed such extraordinary bias on the whole question that his statements can carry no weight.
- HOUDINI:** Why should I lie?
- DOYLE:** Indeed, there seemed to be a sort of chronic dislike, almost hatred, in his mind toward any and every thing spiritual.
- HOUDINI:** I have no hatred of spirits.
- DOYLE:** My wife, Jean, and I invited Houdini to join us in a séance--Jean having some psychic sensitivity which I have sought to encourage over the years.
- HOUDINI:** My mind was open.
- DOYLE:** During the séance Jean received psychic impressions, which she wrote down. When the contact ended she handed the paper to Houdini. It was a message from his mother. Houdini received it gratefully.

- DOYLE (cont'd):** He seemed moved by it, enthusiastic at the prospect of being reunited with his beloved mother.
- HOUDINI:** I only ever wanted to be justly convinced. I only ever wanted see my *anjya* once again. I thought when I came here that I would find her. But there is no connection. She is nowhere and my voice is lost.
- DOYLE:** But later, when a newspaper asked him about it, he disavowed the message.
- HOUDINI:** It was written in English and marked with the sign of a cross. From My Jewish Hungarian *anjya*.
- DOYLE:** He suggested Jean and I had deceived him.
- HOUDINI:** No, you deceived only yourselves! I have no warfare with you.
- DOYLE:** The mistake was in allowing it to become public. I have tried to reach Houdini many times since his passing, to express my regret. He has never come through.
- HOUDINI:** I have been here all the time! If only you could hear me speak everything would be settled, finally. If only you didn't place your faith in frauds!
- FREEMAN:** Perhaps he will come through tonight?
- DOYLE:** I am ever hopeful. But if it is to be so, he will not make himself known be in the usual way. There would need to be some twist of showmanship to confound and astonish. Houdini always mixed up illusions with things which are truly beyond anyone's comprehension.
- HOUDINI:** *(To the audience)* You know, I once met Sarah Bernhardt--the greatest actress of the nineteenth century. This was at the end of her career, mind. She'd fractured her knee, the injury refused to heal and when it turned gangrenous the doctors had to amputate. Anyway, some time later, she comes to see me perform and afterwards gave me the greatest professional compliment I ever received. "Monsieur Houdini," she said to me, "you do such marvellous things. Couldn't you bring back my leg for me?" You see, I made her *believe!*
- FREEMAN:** He was a charlatan then?
- HOUDINI:** Oho! Coming from you!
- DOYLE:** In a way, I suppose. He pretended to produce illusions when, in reality, he was actually a very powerful psychic.
- HOUDINI:** Never underestimate the power of self-delusion. Sir Arthur does most of the work himself.

- DOYLE:** I witnessed Houdini's abilities at close quarters. One time, he handed me a writing slate and asked me to examine it.
- HOUDINI:** He inspected everything closely (*Houdini picks up the writing slate and displays both blank sides*) and found nothing out of the ordinary.
- DOYLE:** Houdini asked me to hang the slate from a wire then write on a piece of paper anything at all that came into my mind. Then he asked me to take a ball covered in white ink and place it against the surface of the slate. I did so and straight away it began to move of its own accord. As it moved across the slate it spelled out a phrase--
- (TOGETHER):** "Mene, mene, tekel upharsin," (*Houdini turns the slate around, revealing this same phrase written in white on the previously blank surface*)
- DOYLE:** --a Hebrew phrase meaning, "The king has been weighed and found wanting." This was the exact phrase I had written on the piece of paper that was still in my pocket!
- HOUDINI:** I devoted a lot of time and thought to that illusion; I worked at it, on and off, all winter.
- DOYLE:** Of course, I am aware that Houdini really was a very skilful conjurer.
- FREEMAN:** But you believe there was something else involved?
- DOYLE:** I asked for an explanation. Houdini refused.
- HOUDINI:** (To **Freeman**) I assured him it was pure trickery.
- FREEMAN:** (To **Doyle**) Was it pure trickery? (**Houdini** reacts slightly)
- DOYLE:** There was no possible explanation other than Houdini's own psychic abilities, which he continued to deny for commercial reasons.
- HOUDINI:** I did it by perfectly normal means. I devised the trick to show what can be done. You jumped to the conclusion that things you see are the work of 'spirits,' simply because you could not explain them!
- DOYLE:** Houdini's refusal to acknowledge his own true nature was the greatest enigma of all his strange performances. Be his mystery what it may, he was a great personality, with many outstanding qualities, and the world is the poorer for his loss.

**ACT I****SCENE 4**

*The lights are now dimmed, with a spotlight on the table, from which the props have been removed, and the two chairs. **Doyle** and **Freeman** sit facing each other at either side.*

*This scene is to be worked out by Nik & the team to present some séance performance magic, to establish the atmosphere and sow a seed of wonder in the minds of the audience. This first part of the séance should only allude to the presence of non-specific spirits.*

## ACT I

## SCENE 5

*Having established an atmosphere of psychic sensitivity, Doyle and Freeman remain seated at the table. Another spotlight now picks out Houdini standing upstage left.*

- DOYLE:** Can anyone here doubt the presence of spirits?
- FREEMAN:** I sense the spirit of a man. He is known to you. He wishes to speak.
- DOYLE:** He is welcome. Does he give a name?
- FREEMAN:** He says: "It is Pheneas."
- DOYLE:** A familiar spirit guide. He has sent across messages to me before.
- FREEMAN:** There is another with him. No, there are two. Pheneas says: "These are the brothers to whom you wish to speak."
- HOUDINI:** Naturally!
- DOYLE:** Ira and William Davenport? What do they wish to say?
- FREEMAN:** They say: "We know you. We follow the spirit path."
- DOYLE:** Do you know me?
- FREEMAN:** "Yes. No. This place is--familiar."
- DOYLE:** You have been here before?
- FREEMAN:** "Sadness. Shame."
- HOUDINI:** Do you know me?
- FREEMAN:** They say: "Houdini is not one of us."
- DOYLE:** What do you say about Houdini?
- FREEMAN:** They say: "Houdini is not one of us."
- DOYLE:** Please be clear. What do you mean, 'Houdini is not one of us'?
- FREEMAN:** "He is not among us."
- HOUDINI:** What is this?
- DOYLE:** Not among you where? Has he not passed over to the other side?
- FREEMAN:** "He is not among us."
- DOYLE:** Who is speaking? Is it Ira, Houdini's friend?

**FREEMAN:** "He is among you."

**DOYLE:** I do not understand. Is he then an unhappy spirit? Does he haunt this place?

**FREEMAN:** "He is with you now. We are with you now."

**DOYLE:** Does he haunt me? I thought I felt something earlier.

**HOUDINI:** Not a chance! You have all the sensitivity of a--

**FREEMAN:** SSSSSSSSSSS! (**Freeman** looks directly at **Houdini**)

**DOYLE:** Are they still with us?

**FREEMAN:** Pheneas says: "They are with you now."

**DOYLE:** And is Houdini here? Do you sense his presence?

**FREEMAN:** Pheneas says: "There is one who wishes to speak."

**DOYLE:** Is it Houdini? Is it Ira once more? Who is it?

**FREEMAN:** It is someone you have been thinking of greatly. Someone close to your heart.

**HOUDINI:** No.

**FREEMAN:** It is a young man.

**DOYLE:** Is it my son?

**FREEMAN:** Yes, your son.

**HOUDINI:** No, no!

**DOYLE:** Kingsley?

**FREEMAN:** He is coming through: (**Freeman** speaks in a new voice) *Father*

**HOUDINI:** No! This is too outrageous!

**DOYLE:** Dear boy, is that you?

**FREEMAN:** *Father--Pardon.*

**HOUDINI:** (**Houdini** plants his hands on the table between **Doyle** and **Freeman**) His son, Kingsley Doyle. Who was a gifted medical student, who enlisted when war broke out and was commissioned in the field. Who was wounded at the Battle of the Somme, and returned to the front at Passchendale.

- HOUDINI (cont'd):** Who went straight back to medical training immediately the war ended. And who caught influenza and died in the pandemic. He asks for pardon?
- DOYLE:** Pardon for what? You have nothing to be sorry for. It is so wonderful to hear you speak!
- FREEMAN:** *I am so often with you, but you do not know it. I am continually in the house. I watch the children play in the garden.*
- DOYLE:** Bless you, my dear.
- FREEMAN:** *Father--I was wrong.*
- DOYLE:** No, my son, it is never wrong to stand up for your belief. We argued about about ideas, about my spiritualist lectures, about organised religion. It does not matter. I only ever loved you and admired your courage of conviction.
- FREEMAN:** *Father--You were right. Trust more.*
- HOUDINI:** You make him such a fool!
- DOYLE:** You are on the other side, Kingsley. One day I will see your face again! But tell me, are you happy?
- HOUDINI:** No.
- FREEMAN:** *Yes--So happy.*
- DOYLE:** Are there others with you? Who else is there?
- FREEMAN:** (**Freeman** speaks now in a different voice) *Another.*
- DOYLE:** Who are you?
- FREEMAN:** (**Freeman** looks directly at **Houdini**) *Anyja.*
- HOUDINI:** Anyja?
- DOYLE:** I don't know anyone of that name. Who is Anna?
- FREEMAN:** *Anyja. Cecelia Weisz.*
- HOUDINI:** Anjya is what Houdini called his mother; Madame Weisz?
- FREEMAN:** *It's so different over here, so much larger... beautiful...all sweetness... nothing hurts.*
- DOYLE:** Where are you? Is your son there with you?



**FREEMAN:** *I am where I would most wish to be. With my beloved ones. Except ... I have lost my son.*

**DOYLE:** What do you feel? Are you happy?

**HOUDINI:** There is only the absence of her. There is only my desire to connect.

**DOYLE:** Madame Weisz? Kingsley? Houdini? Are you there?

**FREEMAN:** (**Freeman** watches Houdini retreat) *He is not among us.*

*Houdini* backs into the spirit cabinet. The door closes.

## ACT I

## SCENE 6

*Doyle stands at the lectern. Freeman remains seated at the table.*

**DOYLE:** I was in Nottingham, and just about to go onto the platform to deliver a lecture on spiritualism, when I was told that Kingsley, my dear son, had passed away. It was a severe trial and test. But I went onto the stage and gave my talk. I would not break faith with the public. They had learned to trust me, and I must be worthy of that trust. Besides, Kingsley would wish it so. There is no death; there is only the passing of a veil.

*Quiet sounds begin to emanate from the spirit cabinet--twanging strings, tambourines, etc.--that suggest the performance of the Davenport brothers. They are sparse at first, gradually becoming more frequent.*

**FREEMAN:** Do you hear that?

**DOYLE:** I hear nothing.

**FREEMAN:** There!

**DOYLE:** Was it one rap or two?

**FREEMAN:** No. A voice! Don't you hear it?

**DOYLE:** Pheneas?

**FREEMAN:** No, no. Not *that*. A voice. Cutting through all this other noise.

**DOYLE:** Other noise?

**FREEMAN:** Surely you must also hear it?

**DOYLE:** I am not sure. Perhaps I did hear... something.

*Houdini emerges from the cabinet. The noises continue as he walks to the front and centre, looking out at the audience.*

**FREEMAN:** It says: *She ... is ...*

**DOYLE:** Yes?

**FREEMAN:** *She is...*

**FREEMAN & HOUDINI:** *A FRAUD!*

**DOYLE:** Houdini! He is among us. Here is the proof! How else would he announce his acceptance of the psychic truth other than by denying it!

*As the scene progresses the noise gradually increases in volume and intensity, eventually rising to a cacophony that drowns out **Doyle's** words.*

**DOYLE:** Ours has been a time of loss. It has been our fate to face the most frightful calamity. But we, who have borne the pains, must also learn the lesson which they were intended to convey.

**DOYLE:** If we do not learn it and proclaim it, then when can it ever be learned and proclaimed?

**FREEMAN:** He is here among us!

**DOYLE:** If our souls, wearied and tortured during these dreadful years of self-sacrifice and suspense, can show no radical changes, then what souls will ever respond to a fresh influx of heavenly inspiration? In that case the state of the human race would indeed be hopeless, and never in all the coming centuries would there be any prospect--

*As the cacophony rises in volume Doyle becomes increasingly passionate. As he gets to the end of his speech he catches the glass, which showers Houdini with water. At the same moment the cacophony stops.*

**DOYLE:** Well, ladies and gentlemen. Perhaps I have not converted you. But I have at least baptised you.