

The King of Escape

How can a front-page story change a person's life?

¹ "Please listen carefully as Tom gives his report," Ms. Lopez began. "Tom, you may begin your report on the importance of a front-page story."

² "It was 1898," Tom began. "A young man raced up the stairs of a Chicago apartment house. Once inside, he spread the morning paper on the table. The front-page picture showed him smiling. At his side were the police chief and two jail guards. The story went like this:

³ **Young Magician Slips Out of Jail**

A twenty-four-year-old magician named Harry Houdini boasts that no locks, chains, or jails can hold him. He has proved his claim. Houdini asked the head of a Chicago jail to lock him in a cell.

⁴ Guards checked to see that Houdini did not have any sharp instruments on his person. The guards put handcuffs on him and then locked him in an old cell.

⁵ Ten minutes later, Houdini walked into the jail's main office. What's more, he entered the office through the front door. The police chief and the guards stood and stared at Houdini in amazement. They could not explain the young magician's escape.

⁶ "This front-page story made Houdini famous," Tom said. "For years he had invited reporters to watch his act. He had wanted the publicity. During this time, he and his wife Bess worked as a team. They played in small theaters, circuses, and traveling shows across the land. They might put on ten shows a day, but only make twenty-five dollars a week. Often the team had no work at all.

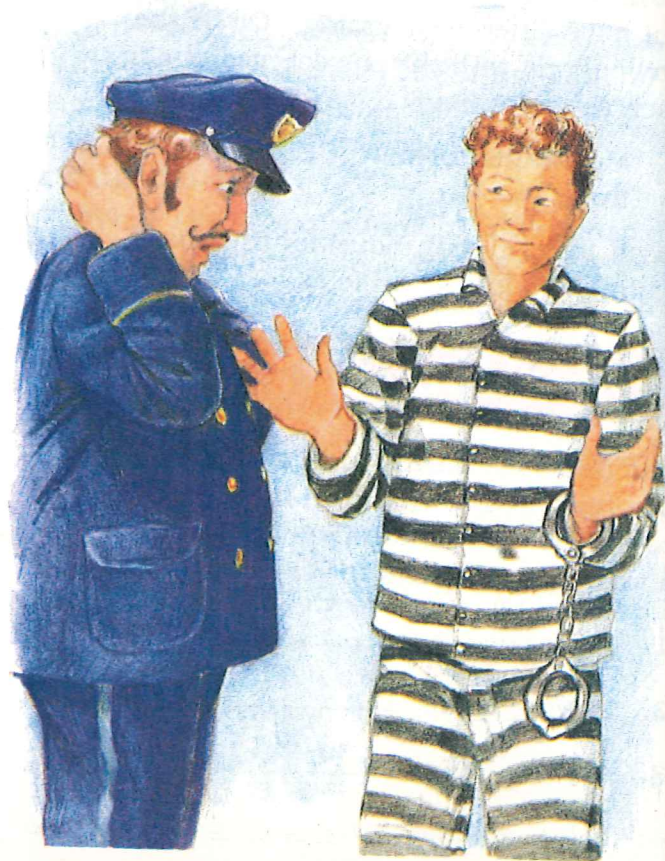
⁷ "After the newspaper story, Houdini began to get offers to perform from all over the world. In England, he was handcuffed and chained with twenty pounds of iron. The magician was then tossed into a river.

He swam to the surface in less than a minute.

⁸ "Russian police locked him in a small cell used to carry prisoners. It was really a small, strong steel safe on wheels. No one had ever escaped from it. Houdini freed himself in forty-five minutes.

⁹ "In Washington, D.C., Houdini's arms were tied, and he was lifted one hundred feet into the air, head down. In less than three minutes, he was free!" Tom exclaimed. "The crowd below cheered as the straps fell to the ground.

¹⁰ "For years, Houdini proved his word. Nothing could hold him down. He escaped drowning two thousand times, he picked more than twelve thousand locks, and he could free himself from traps specially made to hold him. Houdini no longer had to beg reporters to watch his act. They gladly went to write about the 'King of Escape.'"



Knowing the Words

Write the words from the story that have the meanings below.

1. brags

_____ (Par. 3)

2. statement made as a fact

_____ (Par. 3)

3. public attention

_____ (Par. 6)

4. Check the phrase in which *slip* has the same meaning as it does in the newspaper headline in paragraph 3.

- ___ a small piece of paper
- ___ to lose balance
- ___ to move quietly or easily

Working with Words

Rewrite each group of words below. Use possessive forms.

1. the handcuffs of the guards _____

2. the escape of Houdini _____

The prefix **ir-** usually means "not." Add **ir-** to each word below. Then use the new word in a sentence.

3. responsible _____

4. resistible _____

5. regular _____

Reading and Thinking

1. Check the main idea of the story.
 - ___ traveling around the world
 - ___ an amazing escape artist
 - ___ how to perform magic tricks
2. What did people think of Houdini's acts before the front-page story?

3. How did the front-page story change Houdini's life? _____

4. The author wrote this story to
 - ___ talk about traveling.
 - ___ explain Houdini's childhood.
 - ___ explain the effects of a newspaper story.
5. Write one change in Houdini's life after the newspaper story was printed. _____

Learning to Study

Complete the following outline to explain what happened to Houdini in each place.

- I. England
 - A. Handcuffed and chained
 - B. _____
 - C. _____
- II. Russia
 - A. _____
 - B. _____