

GOSSAMER

A play

by
JOHN MISTO

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DO contact ORiGiN™ Theatrical if you have any questions about anything. At all. And we mean anything. One of us that works here (not me) has a peculiar interest in recording the unusual bird calls of the adult hoatzin (a species of tropical bird found in wet forest and mangrove of the Amazon and the Orinoco delta in South America) so we should be able to answer any questions you have about the Hoatzin. Plus we know some things about some other things too.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Dark Voyager

Harp on the Willow

Lip Service

The Shoe-Horn Sonata

Peace Train: The Cat Stevens Story

Sky

AUTHOR - JOHN MISTO

John Misto has been writing plays since 1992. His play, *The Shoe-Horn Sonata* has been reprinted nineteen times and sold more than sixty thousand copies. *The Shoe-Horn Sonata* also won the NSW Premier's Literary Award for Best Play and the Australia Remembers National Playwriting Prize.



Misto's other works include *Dark Voyager* about the turbulent relationship between Joan Crawford and Marilyn Monroe. Misto also wrote the hugely successful play, *Harp on the Willow* which won the Rodney Seaborn Award for Best Play. John Misto is co-writer of *Peace Train: The Cat Stevens Story* which has enjoyed several successful national tours of Australia.

John Misto's most recent play, *Lip Service* had a sell-out season at London's Park Theatre in 2017 (under the title *Madame Rubinstein*) and a successful season at Sydney's Ensemble Theatre and at the Lawler Theatre in Melbourne. *Lip Service* has had successful seasons in Prague (in Czech translation) and in Ekaterinburg (in Russian translation) also under the title *Madame Rubinstein*. It is the first play by an Australian playwright to be performed in Russia.

John Misto is also an established scriptwriter and his telemovies and scripts have won many awards including the Queensland Premier's Literary Award, three Australian Film Institute Awards, three Australian Writers' Guild Awards and a Gold Plaque at the Chicago Television Awards.

John Misto has degrees in Arts and Law from the University of New South Wales.

**“History is that which has happened - but
is not generally known to have happened.”**

- Hal Porter

REVIEWS

“Misto’s writing gifts are so enormous as to be daunting.”

– James Waites, *Sydney Morning Herald*

“Decades of Disney and Hollywood schmaltz have made fairies an uninteresting proposition for us today, but Misto shows them as symbols of pre-industrial nature and pre-adult fantasy, who had better survive in some form if we are to. *Gossamer* unfolds like a mystery drama. Like the best mysteries it doesn’t answer every question.”

– Mark Stoyich

“Misto is a master craftsman. He arranges his scenes like units in a parquet floor - dove-tailing, juxtaposing, building intricate patterns, fitting a new piece inside an already established border. Best of all, he sustains his story’s mystery and promise until the final blackout.”

– *Sun Herald*

Premiere Production: *Gossamer* was performed professionally at the Ensemble Theatre, Sydney in 1995, and Fortune Theatre, Dunedin in 1998.

WRITER'S NOTE

This play is based on actual events. Some of these events are so astonishing that the audience can be forgiven for thinking I made them up. However history and biography can verify the following:

In 1920, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle actually published a book called 'The Coming of the Fairies' in which he insisted that fairies existed and that two little girls had photographed them. The book destroyed his reputation.

The Cottingley photographs were examined by dozens of experts – men who had exposed other frauds routinely. No one could explain them, not even the Bank of England's Forgery Investigators. For over seventy years they remained inexplicable.

Towards the end of her life, one of the girls, Frances, implied that the photos were not genuine. Yet she never gave a satisfactory explanation as to how she and her cousin Elsie fabricated them.

Conan Doyle's visit to Australia, in 1920, to lecture on spiritualism, was an incredible success. Thousands greeted him wherever he went. Most Australian newspapers refused to write about Sir Arthur's visit because his views had been denounced by the Church.

All details concerning Sir Arthur's lectures, work, and theories are true. The well-known Australian Sensitive, Charles Bailey, really existed and impressed Sir Arthur greatly.

For several years Sir Arthur and Harry Houdini enjoyed a fascinating but turbulent friendship. The details concerning

Houdini are true. He also visited Australia where, according to his biographers, he was the first man to officially fly an aeroplane on this continent. During his escape from the bottom of the Yarra River he dislodged the body of a suicide – and the shock nearly caused him to drown.

Houdini, like Sir Arthur, was obsessed with the Cottingely photos. Houdini became vehemently anti-spiritualistic. He spent his life “unmasking” clairvoyants. Ironically he died on Halloween – Feast of the Spirits – after being punched in the stomach by his biggest fan. His wife claimed he sent her a sign from beyond the grave.

For reasons no one has ever been able to explain, Houdini bought America’s first electric chair – after it had been used to kill five people. He had the largest occult library in the world and took hundreds of X-Rays of his body.

In 1926, the year Houdini died, the real Frances made a visit to America.

The attempt by the young Princess Elizabeth to leap from the royal box and join the fairies is true. The details concerning the Palace intruder in 1882 are true, as are the descriptions of the Queen stamping her foot on the wooden bridge.

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CHARACTERS

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE (60) - A world famous author and expert on the spirit world. He is smart, surprisingly modest, down-to-earth and sincere.

HARRY HOUDINI (45) - A world famous escape artists and stuntman. Houdini is the ultimate showman. He sprays ether on his audiences so they are too dulled to see through his tricks. Houdini is cynical, tough and a bitter enemy of spiritualism. He has a Hungarian accent.

FRANCES GRIFFITHS (15) - A young, naive girl, honest and trusting. Also doubles as **BETH**.

ELSIE WRIGHT (14) - Cousin of Frances, young, innocent, fun-loving.

FRANCES WADE (80) - The adult Frances Griffiths, smart, alert and no longer trusting. Frances Wade looks like a sweet old lady, but appearances are often deceptive.

EDWARD LOVATT (20s) - An MI5 agent, youngish, eager, and not as clever as he needs to be.

MRS. BETH HOUDINI - Harry's cynical, long-suffering wife. Beth longs to hang up her performing tights and retire but Harry will not let her. Beth has no illusions about fairies.

CHARLES BAILEY (20s) - Charles really existed. He is a well-know Australian "sensitive", capable of contacting the spirit-world and receiving gifts from them via his rectum. One of the gifts includes a small wax bust of John the Baptist. Also doubles as **THE MASTER OF CEREMONIES** and **JIM WHITEHEAD**.

JIM WHITEHEAD (20) - American, superficially charming but also quite lethal.



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THE PLAY

ACT ONE

ACT ONE**SCENE 1**

A small bedroom in the Camelot Nursing Home, London, in the 1990's. No luxury here – a small bed, a table, an old fashioned (commode) chair and an upright wardrobe.

Someone is knocking on the door. Not too loudly. No answer. More knocking. Then the door opens slowly and a man (Lovatt) peers around, then enters the bedroom.

Lovatt might be a burglar. He certainly acts like one. He looks around the room, opens the table's drawer, then drops to his knees to search under the bed.

Not having found what he's after, Lovatt opens the wardrobe. Inside he finds Mrs Frances Wade, 85, who has been hiding in there. It is hard to say who is more shocked.

FRANCES: (IN TERROR) Aahh!!

LOVATT: (UNPLEASANTLY SURPRISED) Aaahhh!!
(HOLDING HIS CHEST & GASPING) Oh my God – oh my God –

FRANCES: (STAYING IN THE CUPBOARD) What are you doing?

LOVATT: (SITTING) Trying not to have a heart attack.

FRANCES: You were fingering my personals!

LOVATT: (GASPING) You know what I'm looking for.

FRANCES: (PASSING HIM MONEY) Here. It's all I have.

LOVATT: It's not your money I want.

Frances looks appalled. She shuts herself back in the cupboard.

FRANCES: (CALLING OUT) Help! Rape!

LOVATT: (ALARMED) Sshh – sshh – don't *say* that. Please!

FRANCES: (CALLS IN TERROR) Rape!

LOVATT: (DESPERATELY TALKING TO THE CUPBOARD DOOR) M'am – m'am – I don't know who you are – but my whole *life's* in your hands. (If) You yell like that, I'll lose this job, And without a job I can't pay rent. I'll end up living in a park until I'm kicked to death by skin-heads...

FRANCES: What are you doing in my room?

LOVATT: The matron sent me.

FRANCES: You're not on staff.

LOVATT: I started this morning.

FRANCES: Where's your uniform?

LOVATT: Soaking in Napi-san. I was feeding Major Bruckman up in Geriatric Care. I think he was re-living the Battle of Britain.

FRANCES: He was a gunner in the air-force.

LOVATT: Well the Luftwaffe arrived along with the soup. So he threw the bowl at me. He might be senile but his aim's still good.

FRANCES: (OPENING THE CUPBOARD SLIGHTLY) Well if Matron sent you, what does she want?

LOVATT: (TACTFULLY) She thinks some cups and saucers might have wandered in here from the kitchen.

FRANCES: She said that?

LOVATT: Not quite. *Her* exact words were – “There’s enough china in that cupboard to open a Wedgwood factory.”

FRANCES: (MUTTERS) Cow.

LOVATT: Will you let me take a look in there – please?

Frances opens the door reluctantly and steps out.

FRANCES: Go on.

LOVATT: (SLIGHTLY NERVOUS) You won't shut it – will you? I can't stand being locked in anywhere.

As Lovatt searches, Frances sits on the commode chair.

LOVATT: Why were you hiding in here?

FRANCES: I thought you were bringing my tablets. I refuse to take a Mogadon until it's dark outside. Matron likes us all in bed by four so she can sit in her office and watch “Home & Away”. She doesn't even come out for cardiac arrests.

LOVATT: (STEPPING OUT EMPTY HANDED) I guess she was wrong – about the china.

Lovatt looks at the commode chair.

LOVATT: Would you mind?

FRANCES: Nothing's private any more.

But Frances gets up. Lovatt lifts the lid – looks inside – and looks at Frances.

FRANCES: (WITH DIGNITY) They were there when I moved in.

And Lovatt produces a whole stack of china – along with a bottle of whiskey.

FRANCES: I'd offer you some – but you don't drink, do you?

LOVATT: (AMAZED) How did you –?

FRANCES: Not a single burst vein on the whole of your nose.

LOVATT: That's very observant.

FRANCES: (MODESTLY) Oh it's elementary Mr –

LOVATT: Lovatt. But you can call me Ed.

FRANCES: I never get familiar with the staff.

LOVATT: (HURT) Sure.

FRANCES: Don't be offended. Please. I know things can't be easy for you now – what with your divorce and all.

LOVATT: (STUNNED) How on earth –

FRANCES: (POINTING TO LOVATT'S RINGLESS LEFT HAND) Wedding ring mark. A woman might take hers off for work – but a man never bothers – unless he's cheating or –

LOVATT: (SADLY) Or his wife's gone to Spain with the dentist – (BITTERLY) – on the money *I* paid for her crowns... You're a regular Sherlock Holmes. How long have you been here – at Camelot?

FRANCES: (HAUNTED) I don't really know any more.

LOVATT: (SYMPATHETICALLY) It must be hard – growing old – having Nature put the boot in.

FRANCES: You remember what's important. The rest just goes – like gossamer.

LOVATT: Huh?

FRANCES: Those little webs you see on the grass – they say they're left by fairies.

LOVATT: The only things the fairies leave are condoms in the park.

Suddenly there is a loud and ominous click at the door.

LOVATT: (ALMOST SPOOKED) What was that?

FRANCES: Just matron – locking up.

LOVATT: ‘Struth! She’s locked me in.

And Lovatt hurries to the door.

LOVATT: (CALLS) Hello out there – Matron? (TO
FRANCES) Why can’t she hear me?

FRANCES: Because she’s raced down the hall to watch “Home
& Away”.

LOVATT: (WORRIED BUT HIDING IT) Oh well – no
problem – I’ll just climb out your (window) – (STOPS IN
DISMAY)

FRANCES

Aren’t the bars beautiful? This century’s contribution to
architecture.

LOVATT: (EDGY) I don’t like being... confined in small
places.

FRANCES: She’ll be back sooner or later. I usually get a toilet
break between “Sons & Daughters” and “Heartbreak
High”... What did matron tell you about me?

LOVATT: Not much... She mentioned you’d been friends with
some writer.

FRANCES: (OFFENDED) Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was more
than “some writer”. (HOLDING UP WHISKEY
TUMBLER) *This* was a present from him – from his trip to
Australia in 1920.

LOVATT: (NOT LISTENING & GETTING PANICKY) They shouldn't lock old people up.

FRANCES: Oh they don't do this to *everyone*. Just me.

And Lovatt looks at Frances uneasily.

FRANCES: Didn't matron "fill you in" – about Sir Arthur and myself?

Lovatt shakes his head – with dread.

FRANCES: Odd... She never tires of telling people how I was the one who killed him.

LOVATT: (ALARMED) That isn't very funny.

FRANCES: Perhaps she's getting forgetful, poor dear. Let's hope she remembers to let us out.

LOVATT: (POUNING ON THE DOOR) Matron! Matron! Anyone!

Frances, meanwhile, calmly puts the stolen china back in the commode –

FRANCES: Sshh, Mr Lovatt. Not so loud. You don't want to lose your job. (SITTING ON THE COMMODE SEAT WITH A TUMBLER OF WHISKEY) Isn't this nice!

LOVATT: (YELLING DESPERATELY – AT THE DOOR) Help! Rape!!

FRANCES: (HAPPILY) I haven't had a visitor for ages.

And Frances downs her whiskey.

Darkness

ACT ONE

SCENE 2

A fanfare of trumpets – from the opening bars of The Lion in Winter.

It is 1920. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle strides onto the stage of the Sydney Town Hall.

He is an earnest, imposing man, an ex-boxer. Sir Arthur is not a polished orator but he knows how to speak from the heart. And this is the reason for his world- wide success. He wears a black arm-band. Sounds of applause greet his entry.

CONAN DOYLE: My dear, dear friends! I am stunned by the warmth of my welcome here – to the shores of sunny Australia.

MALE HECKLER’S VOICE: Go home you pommie twit!

CONAN DOYLE: I’m not here as the writer of Sherlock Holmes but as an ordinary man on a spiritual quest. Yet I was told that I’d find Sydney to be the most spiritually barren place on earth.

MALE HECKLER’S VOICE: You haven’t been to Melbourne, mate!

CONAN DOYLE: I was warned that your journalists would boycott my talks – that your clergy would denounce me and order all Christians to stay away from my lectures. Yet thousands of you have risked damnation and filled this Sydney Town Hall tonight. Why? Because all of you know just what it is like to open your doors to the telegram boy – to hear him say “I’m sorry” as he hands you the orange envelope... with those dreaded words inside – “His Majesty regrets to inform you...”

On the screen – faces of soldiers, young soldiers, innocent and smiling in family portraits. The last one shows a handsome corporal.

CONAN DOYLE: This – (BRAVELY) this is Kingsley, my son, the joy of my life, killed, at Pozieres. (VERY CALMLY) I died there with him...

Another face appears – a sergeant – slightly older –

CONAN DOYLE: (UPSET BUT IN CONTROL) My brother, Innes, gunned down at the Somme. A part of *me* perished there too. For our gallant dead, the war is over. But not for us. For us there is only grief. But what if it were possible to glimpse our loved ones on the Other Side – as we strained to glimpse those fine young men when they marched away to fight? What if we could raise them up as Jesus once raised Lazarus?

WOMAN HECKLER’S VOICE: Heretic! Blasphemer!

Other voices on the soundtrack support or shush her.

CONAN DOYLE: This is 1920, madam. Would you burn me at the stake?

Another photo appears on the screen. It shows a “refined” English woman. The photo is unremarkable – except that it also contains the fuzzy form of a man in long white cricket flannels. He is standing beside the seated woman.

CONAN DOYLE: All over the Empire we are being bombarded with signs and signals from the world beyond. (HOLDING UP A PAGE) A letter from Mrs Ernestine Mitchell, mother of the well-known English batsman. (READS) “When my son was fighting overseas, he begged me to have my photograph taken as he longed for one to look at. On the very day I did this, Phillip was killed at Verdun. A few weeks later I collected my photo. I was quite surprised to see him in it. Yes, Sir Arthur. My late son Phillip, is standing beside me, dressed in his flannels and blazer. I cannot explain how he came to be there – but oh, as his mother – what a comfort to know (WITH SINCERITY) that even though he might be dead, Phillip still plays cricket for England!”

A mixed response from the unseen audience. Some cheers. Some heckles.

CONAN DOYLE: The spirits are there. They are trying to reach us!

And now we see Young Frances and Elsie playing on Cottingley Glen in England.

FRANCES & ELSIE: (CHANTING AS THEY SKIP) “My mother said/ I never should/ play with gypsies/ in the wood”.

CONAN DOYLE: From all round the world we are getting reports – of lights in the sky – of mysterious objects. There

can only be one explanation. Our loved ones on the Other Side are desperate to make contact. Who knows where or when they'll next appear?

FRANCES & ELSIE: *“My father said/ if I did/ he'd hit my head/ with a saucepan lid”.*

The lights dim – eerie music on the soundtrack –

CONAN DOYLE: Let us all join hands and call to our loved ones. Let us ask them for a sign of recognition.

A strange sound. Suddenly Frances looks up and says –

FRANCES: (ALMOST STARTLED) What was *that*?

ELSIE: What?

FRANCES: (CONCERNED) There – in the bush.

ELSIE: Probably just a badger.

FRANCES: Badgers don't fly.

ELSIE: (ALARMED) Frannie – leave it alone! It might be a zeppelin!

But Frances does not hear her. She is staring straight ahead in fascination. Elsie joins her. The two little girls stand side by side, almost mesmerised by what they see.

CONAN DOYLE: (TO SYDNEY AUDIENCE) Do not be alarmed if you suffer a heart attack. The Town Hall ushers carry bottles of cologne. They will sprinkle it on your face to revive you!

ACT ONE

SCENE 3

We hear Lovatt calling out –

LOVATT: Fire! Fire!! – That matron must have a heart of stone.
(TO OLDER FRANCES) I'm sorry – you were saying?

OLDER FRANCES: (CONTINUING HER STORY) We ran all the way home – in a state of almost – shock. We just *had* to tell Pa what we'd seen in the bushes. But all he cared about was our feet. He looked down at them and said (GRIMLY) “Your best Sunday shoes. They're soaked right through.”

And now we see Young Frances and Elsie, still on stage, breathless.

ELSIE: (TO THE UNSEEN PA) We must have... run through the stream to escape them.

LOVATT: Them?

OLDER FRANCES: The fairies.

ELSIE: They were chasing us.

LOVATT: (TO OLDER FRANCES) The *what*?

ELSIE: It's *true*, Uncle. Honest. There are fairies on Cottingley Glen.

OLDER FRANCES: I could tell (that) Pa was angry. He brought out his camera – he'd won it at the fair – and *demand*ed a photo of our fairies – or else! He told us to be back in half an hour.

LOVATT: Mrs Wade – I – don't wish to be rude – but if you go round telling tales like that – no wonder they're locking you up.

OLDER FRANCES: (OFFERING WHISKEY) Here. It might calm you down.

LOVATT: (AT THE DOOR) Matron – Matron!

And now Young Frances stands on stage. Elsie is with her.

YOUNG FRANCES: (LOUD WHISPER) Little Things! Little Things! We've brought you bread and sugar.

ELSIE: Come and play with us. Please.

OLDER FRANCES: Do you think I'd *lie* to people?

LOVATT: Not *lie*, exactly. You're like my Gran. She confuses life with television – and she's a big fan of The X Files.

Suddenly we hear an eerie, chilling sound – like wings flapping in the night. Lovatt jumps up. The Older Frances hears it – and so do Young Frances and Elsie.

LOVATT: What was that?

OLDER FRANCES: Nothing, Mr Lovatt. Nothing *you'd* believe in.

Lovatt picks up the whiskey glass – and gulps its contents down.

Now the Young Frances faces the audience, She holds the Midg camera with shaking hands. An eerie wind. The light

begins to change. And then, with a supreme effort of will, the Young Frances starts to take her photographs.

A lighting effect accompanies each click of the camera. Then gradual darkness...

ACT ONE

SCENE 4

A blur of light, bright but out of focus, appears on the screen. It remains throughout the scene.

The Young Frances and Elsie stand close together on stage.

Frances is peering at something – as if looking through the crack in a door.

ELSIE: Can you see him? Where's he up to?

YOUNG FRANCES: (PEERING) He's just washed the film.

OLDER FRANCES: Pa developed the photos himself. He'd been learning how to do it from a book he'd bought for sixpence.

YOUNG FRANCES: Now he's hanging up the negatives. Once the air dries them out, he'll see everything.

ELSIE: (NERVOUSLY) Quick – let's run.

YOUNG FRANCES: That'll only make him angrier. He'll give us *twice* the hiding.

ELSIE: (SADLY) I wish we'd kept our shoes dry... What's he doing now?

YOUNG FRANCES: He's... (HESITATES BRIEFLY) taking off his belt. (BRAVELY) He's only good for five or six blows – and then his back gives way.

And suddenly we hear Pa's Voice booming out angrily –

PA'S VOICE: (ANGRILY) Frances!! Elsie!!!

It is clear that Pa has just seen what the photos contain. A terrified Elsie buries her head in Frances's protective arms.

And now the blurring light slowly comes into focus. It is the first fairy photograph – literally drying and forming before our eyes.

On the soundtrack we hear the Introduction to Also Sprach Zarathustra by Richard Strauss. If possible, Conan Doyle, Lovatt, the Older Frances and the two young girls should slowly stand up on stage and watch in amazement as the photograph takes shape.

As Strauss's thunderous drums reverberate in our ears, this is what we see –

A photo of Young Frances, her right hand beneath her chin, staring innocently at the camera (and therefore at us). In front of Frances there are four fairies. One fairy is playing a flute. The others could very well be dancing.

The greatest mystery of the twentieth century has just begun...

ACT ONE

SCENE 5

*Lovatt looks at the photo of Frances & the Fairies in an album.
At the same time we see it on the screen.*

LOVATT: (SLIGHTLY IMPATIENT) They've been cut out from a book.

FRANCES: My father's words exactly. Then he tossed them away and thrashed us both.

LOVATT: Matron!

FRANCES: But when no one was looking Mother saved them from the rubbish. She wiped away the potato scraps – and mailed them to Sir Arthur.

LOVATT: Conan Doyle?

FRANCES: (NODS, THEN WITH REGRET) If only we'd known, we would have stopped her – just taken our beatings and never told a soul.

LOVATT: (POINTING TO PHOTO) Sir Arthur can't have been fooled by *that*. If they were real, you'd be looking *at* them. You're just staring at the camera.

FRANCES: Some creatures are scared of eye-contact. You don't know much about wild things, do you?

LOVATT: I'm beginning to learn why they die in captivity... Do you tell your family they lock you up?

FRANCES: (FONDLY) My husband was a lot like you. Didn't believe in our photos either. "Come on," he'd say, "how'd

you *do* them?” (SADLY) (It) Was a stroke that took him. It’s a fairy term – *stroke* – they stroke their hands across your head until they’ve paralysed the brain. (GLARING AT LOVATT) It’s how they punish non-believers.

LOVATT: I wish you wouldn’t say that. I already have a headache.

FRANCES: *You* don’t believe in fairies, do you?

LOVATT: (UNNERVED) Why won’t the matron come?

FRANCES: (DRINKING) For the very same reason she’s locked the door. They terrify her, Mr Lovatt.

LOVATT: *They?*

FRANCES: Why do you think she sent *you* to fetch the china?

LOVATT: (FIRMLY BUT NERVOUSLY) Look – there’s no one in here but you and me.

Frances passes him an envelope with a letter inside it.

LOVATT: (READING THE ENVELOPE) “Forgery Detection Squad – Royal Bank of England” – (LOOKS PUZZLED)

FRANCES: Sir Arthur asked them to analyse our photos.

As Lovatt reads the Bank’s analysis aloud, we see the other photos that Frances and Elsie took – four photographs of themselves cavorting with the fairies of Cottingley Glen. They appear, one by one, on the screen.

LOVATT: (READS) “Dear Sir Arthur, The Bank has magnified the Cottingley photos to 500 times their original size. If they’d been cut out from a book with scissors or a razor, their edges would be jagged. But the outlines of them all are incredibly clean and smooth. Whilst the Bank does not *believe* in fairies, you are urged to treat these creatures with caution – and to avoid financial dealings with them.”

Lovatt looks up, astonished.

FRANCES: (HAUNTED) It was meant to be a simple game – something to do on a dull afternoon. But there’s one tiny problem about playing with fairies. They don’t know when to stop. An afternoon – or seventy years – it’s all the same to them.

LOVATT: (UNNERVED, PANICKY, PULLING ON THE DOOR) If your fairies are real – make them open *this* up!

FRANCES: Be careful, Mr Lovatt. Sometimes they give you what you want – and you can never give it back!

Then slowly the door creeps open.

Is it necessary to mention that Lovatt looks shocked?

ACT ONE

SCENE 6

London, 1921. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle moves onto the stage pushing a small trolley in front of him. The trolley rattles with its load. It is covered with a cloth.

CONAN DOYLE: (TO HIS AUDIENCE) How happy I am to return to London – and to all my friends in the Spiritualist Movement. I can say – in all modesty – that my tour was quite a triumph. Australians are a simple but affectionate race who cannot get enough of the English. And now I'd like to share with you some of the treasures I acquired there.

And with a flourish Conan Doyle removes the cloth covering to reveal several very modest items – which he proceeds to hold up and describe.

CONAN DOYLE: (WITH ADMIRATION AND TENDERNESS – AS IF THESE THINGS WERE ALL PURE GOLD) An ash-tray shaped like a palm-leaf... A hand-carved wooden kangaroo – notice its exquisite detail!... A green whiskey tumbler – and a small wax bust of St. John the Baptist... (LOOKING AT THEM LOVINGLY) These things were all hand-crafted by the Dead – and sent from the Other Side... Oh I'm sure the cynics are smirking – but I was there when they arrived – at a séance in the Sydney suburb of Toor-moora! (NOT WITH A FLOURISH BUT WITH REVERENCE) And tonight I have brought along the man who delivered them – the Great Australian Sensitive, Mr Charles Bailey...

A spot-light reveals a man, standing up, in a trance-like state, and wearing nothing but a canvas bag which comes up to his chin. (This should be as eerie as possible.)

CONAN DOYLE: Sceptics have accused him of hiding things on his person. But beneath this canvas, Mr Bailey is naked!

Gasps from the London audience. Bailey swoons and rolls his eyes. Some frothing at the mouth would also be nice. He

does not look comic. Instead he is very spooky and convincing.

CONAN DOYLE: (IMPRESSED) Some quiet – please – Mr Bailey is “receiving”.

Conan Doyle leans closer to listen to Bailey who mutters barely audible and sometimes garbled words in his trance-like state.

CONAN DOYLE: (TO AUDIENCE) He says... he is... receiving a gift for Mrs Linda – no – *Lydia* Stephens – from her dead brother Roger... And Roger says to tell you – “Happy Birthday Lydia!!!”

As Conan Doyle says these words, Bailey’s gasps, his eyes roll back and his hand shoots high into the air. He is clutching a small but very tacky vase (or whatever).

We hear Lydia Stephens shriek in horror. Then a thudding sound as she collapses.

CONAN DOYLE: (CALMLY) I think Mrs Stephens might have need of some cologne.

Conan Doyle takes the tacky vase from Bailey and looks at it with awe and admiration.

CONAN DOYLE: (EARNESTLY) How could *anyone* who’s witnessed this deny that spirits exist?

Suddenly Houdini calls out –

HOUDINI: Easily! (AS HE STRIDES OR OTHERWISE APPEARS ON STAGE) Your man’s hiding this junk on