

The Clew of the Forgotten Murder

by CARLETON KENDRAKE ©1934 NEA Service, Inc.

CHAPTER XLIII

"I confess," he said, "I don't follow you." Fisher's nod became gloomily emphatic. "Beyond any question," he said, "that is it."

"What is it?" Bleeker asked.

The attorney turned to him. "You are a newspaper publisher. Mr. Bleeker, I am acting as attorney for Mrs. Cathay and for the Cathay estate. My duty to my client probably requires me to keep silent and yet we have been thrown together and yet we have been thrown together and yet we have been thrown together so that I feel it is, in a measure, a joint undertaking. I am, therefore, going to outline this theory to you—a theory which I feel certain will be amply supported by proof. I am going to ask you, however, for your word of honor that you will allow no rumor of this that you will allow no rumor of this that you will allow no rumor of this to creep into your paper until we are ready to make the announcement."

"Fair enough," Griff said to Bleeker. "Promise him."

"I'm making no promises," Bleeker stubbornly insisted. "I'll listen to what you have to say and then I'll decide when it will be published."

Griff reached out to press the button which would call the elevator. "Don't do that just yet," Fisher said. "I want to think."

He moved slightly apart from the two men, started pacing thoughtfully up and down the carpeted corridor. Bleeker caught Griff's eyes.

"I make no blind promises," he said. "What is your theory?"

"I'd prefer you hear it from the lips of the attorney," Griff said, "but evidently we're faced with a conspiracy of murder. I think Fisher is going to tell you to have given him that promise to assure you you won't suffer by it."

"I'm not relying on your assurance," the publisher said. "I'm making no promises."

Fisher apparently reached a sudden decision. He turned and strode along the corridor until he faced the two men.

"Gentlemen," he said in tones of quiet determination, "promise or no promise, I am going to tell you my theory of this case. It is a theory which is amply substantiated by the facts. In the developments which are bound to follow we will have need of some friendly newspaper that understands what is back of the entire situation. I can justify the disclosures which I am about to make upon that ground. It is vital to my client that she have some newspaper that understands the complete situation."

"For some reason this man, Peter Malone, wishes to take the identity of Frank B. Cathay, not for something that is to be done in the future, but for something that has been done in the past. He has, over a period of years, perfected his signature so that a member of that of Frank B. Cathay. However, he knows that there is likely to be some question as to the signature. Therefore, he desires to have an identical signature for purposes of comparison, which handwriting experts can uncover among the supposedly genuine documents of Frank B. Cathay."

"For that reason it becomes imperative that he cash a check under the forged signature so that such a check be found among the effects of Frank B. Cathay as unquestionably a genuine check. He takes the trouble to go, therefore, to a hotel. He knows he will require some means of identification. He takes the trouble to pick Cathay's pocket of these cards. With that as a background, he cashes a check

at the hotel. That was all that he intended to do. That was the purpose of his impersonation. He then intended to disappear.

"Unfortunately, however, he was of an amorous disposition as is so frequently the case with criminals of his type. He allowed himself to become involved with a young woman who, according to her own account, made things very easy for him. In fact, considering her story, she was perhaps the aggressor in making the acquaintance. The man saw no reason why he should not yield to the temptation of the moment but fate intervened. In company with the young woman he was arrested for a minor traffic violation. He was taken to police headquarters. He tried desperately to secure his release, without giving the name of Cathay. He might have done so had the police not checked up the registration of the car he was driving and found that it had been rented under the name of Cathay. Having gone that far, there was only one thing to do. That was to rely upon the identity of Cathay to get him released from jail as quickly as possible."

"But," Bleeker objected, "that doesn't make sense—it isn't logic."

"Why isn't it logic?" the attorney asked.

"Because, if this Peter Malone wanted to establish his signature as that of Frank Cathay he defeated his own purpose. Just as soon as Cathay would receive his statement from the bank he would recognize that the check was one he had not given and that it was a forgery."

Fisher's smile was just a little patronizing.

"I think, Mr. Bleeker," he said, "that you have missed the deadly significance of this entire matter, but I feel certain that your companion, Mr. Griff is keenly aware of it. Shall you tell him, Mr. Griff, or shall I?"

Griff nodded to the lawyer. "You tell him," he said.

Fisher turned, facing Bleeker. "At the time the check was cashed," he said, speaking slowly and with grave emphasis, "the plot, whatever it was, was about to culminate. This man, Malone, knew that Cathay would not be in a position to make any complaint. In other words, he had anticipated the death of Frank B. Cathay, in which event the canceled check with the forged signature would be found among his effects. A check-up of the hotel register would show that Cathay was registered there that night; that the man who had cashed the check had exhibited documentary evidence showing he was the real Frank Cathay. Of course this matter would not come up until months after Cathay's death, when the estate had been probated and the claim of this man, Malone, whatever the nature of it, would be presented against the estate and brought up to trial. As you are doubtless aware, litigation takes time and is subject to annoying delay. The attorneys representing the Malone claim, whatever its nature, would demand that the estate produce all documents and vouchers which were in its possession. The canceled check could not have been destroyed because it would have come into the possession of the estate instead of the possession of Cathay before his death. It would, therefore, make an excellent demonstration of the genuineness of the forged signature."

"And what," asked Bleeker, "is the nature of this claim that Malone is to make?"

"I'll hand it there—she knows more tricks than a trained poodle! She's doing all she can to block me outta th' play, but at th' same time, in front of Billy, she's so sweet t'me it hurts—an' he thinks she means it—"

"OH, HELLO, MISTER."

"WELL, THEY SAY OPPOSITES ATTRACT."

"YEAH! AT FIRST, MEBBE—N'AFTER THAT, TH' DELUGE I MIGHT IMAGINE LIVIN' WITH A PERSON WHO THOUGHT N'DID EVERYTHING JUST TH' OPPOSITE FROM TH' WAY YOU DO!! WOULDN'T THAT BE SIMPLY SWEET?"

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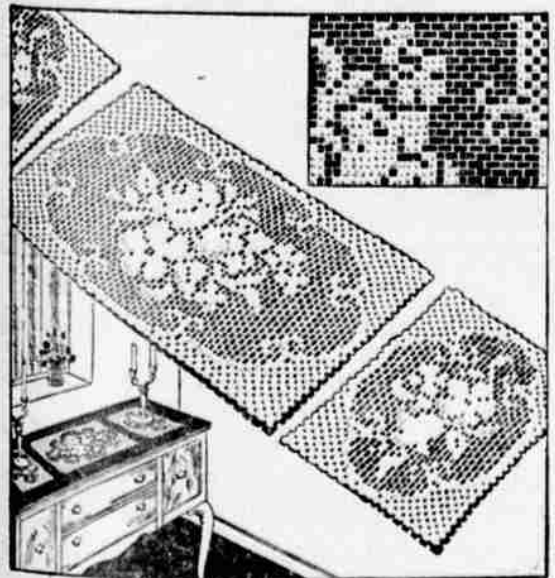
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