

Quirk of Fate

A fast-paced farce
by Pat Cook

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STORY OF THE PLAY

How could a box of cornflakes almost start a world war? Writing an ad campaign for the latest cereal, Hampton's Medicated Cornflakes, is tough, especially when you have to come up with one fast to get a check so you can give it to your landlady!

That's what faces Rosie, Max, and Sid, who are so desperate not be evicted they hit upon the idea of quarantining their own office! But when a man stumbles in, stabbed in the back, it's a whole new ballgame. Now, of course, nobody can leave since it's become the scene of a crime. More police show up along with a legal secretary, a Russian travel agent, a handsome doctor, and worst of all, Rosie's mother!

Just when it becomes clear that the dead guy is Butch Crenshaw, a notorious bookie, the F.B.I. arrives, claiming the deceased is really Nick Mandalay, extortionist. Not so, explains the secretary to the Russian Ambassador, stating the victim is Vladimir Kouskowski, a Russian. Now the U.N. is involved! Could this incident heat up the cold war?!

"I'm waiting for the Pope to arrive, saying the dead guy is really Saint Habeas of Corpus!" the legal secretary exclaims.

The police keep attempting to arrest Rosie while her mother keeps trying to fix her up with the doctor. Max keeps fighting off the amorous advances from the Russian agent, while Sid keeps hoping his actor friend will come up with an idea to get them all out of this mess.

"All we're trying to do is sell cornflakes!" yells Rosie.

This fast-paced farce set in the 1950s is full of lies and alibis, and everybody is more concerned with who is in charge rather than who murdered the victim.

This one-set show will have your audience guessing until the final curtain. And the one thing that no one can figure out is just what the victim meant when he whispered into Rosie's ear, "Quirk of Fate."

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7 m, 12 w)

ROSIE: Fast-thinking career woman, 30s.

MAX: Smart and glib man in his early 30s.

SID: Equally clever idea man, also around 30.

SUZIE: Fast-talking, eager newspaper reporter.

MRS. KLEINSTEIN: Pushy landlady, in her 50s.

SONIA: Alluring young Russian travel agent.

PEARL: Cleaning woman with a secret.

HARRIET: Wise legal secretary, 40s.

MILES LUMMIS: Young doctor, in love with Rosie.

MIKE MOLONEY: On-the-beat cop.

BUTCH: Soon-to-be victim, 30. *(Doubles with SCOTT.)*

CAPTAIN FERNDOCK: Police captain, soon to retire.

SNOOKIE: Put-upon, grumbling police secretary.

MOM: Rosie's nosy mother, mid-50s.

PORTER: F.B.I. agent, mid-30s.

BETTY: Miles' nurse, mid-20s.

ETHEL: Rather nervous State Department lady.

GRETA: Stern Russian with a plastic smile.

DONDELINGER: Well-dressed business woman, 40s.

SCOTT: Actor playing a German doctor. *(Doubles with BUTCH.)*

SETTING

The time is the late 1950s. The setting is the office of Reagan, Gleason and Murray, a hopeful up-and-coming advertising firm. The room is reminiscent of an earlier time, with old wallpaper and wainscoting on all the walls. Around the room are various photos and ad posters proclaiming such products as hair tonic, toothpaste, kid's toys, etc. There are four doors utilized in the floor plan.

The first door, SR, leads into the outer hall and the rest of the building. The second door, USR, leads to the conference room while the third door, USL, leads to the restroom. The fourth door, on the SL wall, leads to a back hall and fire escape.

The furniture also looks old. A wooden desk resides USC, parallel to the US wall and faces out. There is a lamp, typewriter and telephone on the desk amid piles of clutter, pens, pencils, etc. There is a semi-matching chair behind it plus a utility chair in front of it. There is a couch DSR, facing the office at an angle. On the SR wall are three large, metal file cabinets, probably bought from an army surplus store. There is a stand-up coat rack in the USL corner on which rests Sid's and Max's jackets and Rosie's purse.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: ROSIE is sitting behind the typewriter while MAX and SID pace in front of the desk. All are deep in thought. This team works together like the proverbial well-oiled machine. Their rapid-fire exchanges to them are only everyday discussions, throwing ideas out just to hear them and get feedback from the others. Just now, however, they are somewhat stumped. Suddenly, Max stops, raises a finger and looks at the others. They look at him in anticipation. He then shakes his head and the three resume their routine. Then Sid stops and snaps his fingers. Again, the other two look at him. He, too, shakes his head and again they return to their apparent dilemma. Then Rosie jumps to her feet!)

ROSIE: *(Bold announcement.)* Nothing like it ever before now!

MAX: *(Catching on.)* A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!

SID: *(Jumping in.)* Don't be left out!

ROSIE: *(Rushes over to the boys.)* Don't let the parade pass you by!

MAX: Get out front with pi-ZAZZ!

SID: Take the lead!

ROSIE: Be the first on your block!

MAX: First in your town!

SID: Set the standard for EXCELLENCE!

ROSIE: Yeah! *(Envisions it.)* Half-page ad!

SID: Two color!

MAX: Tri-color!

ROSIE: A rainbow explosion!

MAX: Bold Cheltenham print!

SID: Colossal!

MAX: Stupendous!

ROSIE: Earth-SHATTERING!

(The THREE stop and look at each other, think and shrug.)

Quirk of Fate

- 6 -

SID: We've already done it.

ROSIE: I know. *(Leans on the desk.)* I just thought it would jump-start something.

MAX: Nice try, though.

SID: Hey, what IS the product, anyway?

ROSIE: *(After a beat.)* I guess that would help. *(SHE moves papers around on the desk until she finds a labeled cereal box.)*

MAX: Does it make a difference?

SID: Does it make a difference? *(HE puts an arm about MAX.)* Max, my boy, we were hired to write the ultimate promotional campaign for a product that is near and dear to our hearts. One which will both enlighten and enrich our lives, our very existence! One which will change the world!

MAX: Which is -- ?

ROSIE: *(Holds up the box.)* "Hampton's Medicated Cornflakes."

SID: *(To MAX.)* And you forgot that? *(HE lets go of MAX. He thinks.)* Cornflakes, cornflakes...

MAX: Where do we go with that?

SID: What do we do with it?

ROSIE: We sell it so we can get a nice, fat check.

SID: How do you medicate cornflakes?

ROSIE: You grab a syringe and you tell them to bend over -- *(Replaces the box on the desk.)*

SID: Sorry I asked.

MAX: *(Thinking.)* Cornflakes, cornflakes...

SID: We get a good slogan and we're locked. Something that'll stick in their brains.

MAX: Something they'll leave the theater humming.

SID: Something that'll stampede the grocery-buying public to their nearest store and stock up!

ROSIE: *(Blandly.)* On cornflakes.

SID: *(Finger in the air.)* Not just ANY cornflakes, Hampton's Medicated Cornflakes.

ROSIE: Well, a slogan is only as good as the product.

SID: You mean the product will BECOME as good as the slogan.

ROSIE: *(Moves to SID.)* Uh-uh. Uh-uh.

End of Freeview

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