

Blind Coincidence Revisited

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EARLY LAST YEAR Yaniv Deautsch emailed asking if I knew who Michael Mence was. I had no idea. Yaniv pointed me in the direction of a trick published under Mence's name in Step Ten of *Corinda's Thirteen Steps to Mentalism* (1959). It was entitled "Blind Coincidence" and, although I didn't know who Mence was, I had seen similar tricks before. You can check out "Four Deuces" in *Scarne on Card Tricks* (1950). Or Dr. Jaks' earlier contribution, "The Dream of a Hermit," published in *The Jinx* (issue 124). Both are good tricks but the Mence version has a simplicity about it that makes it a real puzzler. I've changed it from a behind-the-back handing to a table-handling and made a few suggestions as to how to make it even more baffling. But other than that, "Blind Coincidence" is one of those overlooked tricks that you really should try out.

Effect: The spectator shuffles a deck of cards and then cuts it into two packets. He takes one packet and you take the other.

You each place your packet under the table and remove one card sight unseen. You exchange cards, again without looking at them, and then replace the new card reversed in your packet.

Both packets are placed on the table. You spread the packets face up. The two chosen cards are reversed in the middle of the spreads. When turned over they are revealed to be mates.

The trick is super clean. Easy to do. And will fool your fellow magicians. Just ask Chris Power, Luis de Matos, and Roger Crosthwaite. Sorry guys.

Handling: The first thing to do is secretly steal two mate cards from the deck and place them on your lap. You can palm them out, or use this simpler method. Let's assume that the spectator is sitting opposite you at a table and you've spotted a couple of matching cards together in the deck. Surreptitiously cut them to the top. Let's imagine the two cards are the Queen of Hearts and Queen of Diamonds.

Tell the spectator that you want her to shuffle the deck. You demonstrate with a false shuffle that keeps the two top cards in place. Then you show how she is to take the deck under the table and give it a couple of cuts. Again you show her what to do by taking the deck just below the edge of the table so it is out of the spectator's sight. You immediately spread the two top cards (the two red

Queens) off onto your lap. And then give the deck a couple of cuts. Bring the deck back up immediately and hand it to the spectator.

The spectator does as you did. First she shuffles the deck. Then she cuts the deck under the table. You tell her to do this "without looking." This procedure serves two purposes: it legitimizes your previous actions, and it gets the spectator comfortable with the idea of cutting the deck without looking at it (something she will do again later).

With that done, ask her to put the deck on the table and cut it into two packets.

Ask her to take one of the packets, leaving you with the other. Point out that the spectator is making every choice. She's shuffled. She's cut. She's chosen. You want her to remember this later.

You now take your cards face down below the table as before. She does likewise. You tell her to give the cards one final and complete cut. And then to take the top card and place it face down on the table.

You demonstrate this. However, the card you put on the table is one of those that already lies on your lap.

Place the card in the middle of the table. And then point to a space next to your card and ask the spectator to place her card there. The two cards now lie face down, side by side, in the middle of the table.

Leaving your packet face down in one hand, with your free hand you immediately slide *her* card off the table toward you, saying, "Take the card and hold it face down under the table." Sliding the card rather than picking it up lessens the chance the card will be accidentally turned face up. She picks up *your* card and does the same.

Continue, "Now, without looking, turn over the card and place it somewhere face up in the face-down packet."

She does this. You appear to do the same but actually drop the card face down on top of the packet and instead pick up the remaining lapped card, flip it face up, and insert it into the middle of the packet. You don't want to look or hesitate as you do this. Look straight at the spectator and she will look right back at you. Tell her, "Do it without thinking. Just put the card in the packet." As soon as you are finished, place your packet face down in the center of the table. The spectator will follow.

Recap: "You shuffled the cards. You cut the deck into two packets. We chose cards. Then placed them some-

where in the center of the packets."

This is a reasonable summation of what happened. You just omitted the bit about swapping cards.

The reality is that in one packet you have the Queen of Hearts reversed and in the other the Queen of Diamonds. That's an amazing effect. A rigged coincidence. But before you reveal this you have the chance to claim one or two additional and perfectly genuine coincidences as your own.

First, look at the packets and, if they are of similar size, remark on it. *"Two packets. Pretty much identical. That's interesting."*

Then, turn each packet face up. You might be lucky enough to find a mate on the face of each packet. If so, claim it, saying, *"Not only that but look, two matching cards."*

Spread the packets, side by side, face up across the table. But contrive to do it so the face-down cards in their centers appear to be in roughly the same position. This won't always be the case but it's often close enough for you to say, *"Two cards reversed. Almost in the same position."*

Look at the cards on either side of the reversed cards. They might be similar. Two Fours, for example. If so, claim that coincidence. *"We each placed a card in the deck right next to a Four. What a coincidence."*

Looking for these coincidences doesn't take long and you'll be surprised how many times you'll find a match. When it works, it adds a completely inexplicable element to the trick that even your fellow magicians will find fooling. When you don't find a coincidence, you don't say anything.

Finish by pushing each of the face-down cards from the face-up spreads and turn them over. They match in value and suit. A true blind coincidence.

Notes: Patrick Page once gave me some very good advice regarding presentation. *"If it's not funny or interesting, don't say it."* Since instructions to spectators are rarely funny or interesting, it is best to keep them to the minimum. Instructions must be clear. In this trick the spectator is merely copying your actions. It should feel effortless. I've seen a lot of self-working tricks, including "Out of This World," ruined because the performer's instructions have been garbled and the spectator has to guess what to do. And then, to make it worse, the performer has to correct them. Keep your instructions short and to the point. Use body language where possible. If, at any time during the trick, the spectator hesitates or asks a question about the procedure, then take it as an indicator that you need to

clean something up in the routine.

The coincidences prior to the finale are my suggestion but the original Michael Mence routine is particularly strong. I think there is something in the structure of the trick that makes it psychologically deceptive and catches even well-versed magicians off guard.

Perform the procedure at a rapid clip. The shuffles, the cut, the swapping of the cards. People seem to forget that a swap ever happened. They just remember removing a card and reversing it in the deck. The words you say should reinforce that idea. Never say, *"Take my card and place it in your packet."*

You are way ahead of the game when you begin. The spectator has no idea you already have two cards on your lap. They will remember shuffling the deck. Michael Mence suggested you could steal two pairs of cards. That way you can repeat the trick. Personally, I think that's too risky.

I still don't have any information about Michael Mence. He could have been a friend or customer of Corinda's who had a great trick. It could be a pseudonym. On rereading Step Ten of *Thirteen Steps to Mentalism* it seems possible that "Blind Coincidence" is an impromptu version of Terry Guyatt's "Two of a Kind," also in that volume. Shiv Duggal pointed out that Mence's routine has some similarities to Pat Page's "Continuous You Do As I Do." Funnily enough Patrick Page was a friend of Corinda's, worked alongside him, and contributed to the very same volume of *Thirteen Steps*. I can imagine Pat coming up with a simpler way to do the Guyatt trick but, unsure of its originality, might not have wanted to take any credit for it. But whether this adds up to anything more than coincidence I have no idea. [Editor's Note: You might find the trick "Aces Wild" in *Close-Up Card Magic* by Harry Lorayne of interest if you like this effect.]