

Bridge Romances

Mike Atkinson

Preface

The material in this booklet is an expanded and edited version of a regular column in the newsletter of the Taieri Bridge Club that I produced from 2003 to 2007. The characters that appear here are completely fictional. To non-Taieri residents I might explain that Frieda Mayer's name was derived from the now defunct airline Freedom Air, Gordon Rhode was inspired by the main street through Mosgiel, and Sinclair Whitlands by a wetlands reserve south of Dunedin airport. The other characters' names were entirely invented.

The bridge hands in the original columns either appeared in games played at the Taieri club or at nearby clubs or were designed with some lesson in mind. The depth and interest of these hands are therefore somewhat variable. Broadly however, since they follow the progress in bridge (and in romance) of several new bridge partnerships, they become increasingly deeper.

In preparing the booklet I have lightly edited the original columns. It's remarkable how many analytical errors I needed to correct (and surely I missed several). I have also combined some columns into a single chapter where the narrative made it appropriate.

References to the Taieri bridge club have been removed so as not to distract the reader but, when I picture "the club" where many of the hands were played, I cannot help but imagine the Taieri club where I had so many friends and so much pleasure over the years. My heartfelt thanks go to all the readers of my original columns who bore my juvenile references so patiently.

Mike Atkinson
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Chapter 1

Introducing Frieda and Gordon

Frieda Mayer, our latest member who has just flown in from Sydney on her favourite airline, recently picked up this hand as dealer

♠94
♥AQT87432
♦—
♣QT8

Not being of timid temperament she opened 4♥. Somewhat surprisingly she heard a 4♠ response from her partner, a distinguished middle-aged gentleman called Gordon Rhode. What's this, she thought, doesn't Gordon like my hearts? Just in time she remembered that Gordon's bid must be a cue bid agreeing hearts. Thinking she had nothing to lose by showing her diamond void she gaily bid 5♦. She was somewhat taken aback by Gordon's reply: 7♥! The bidding had been:

West	North	East	South
4♥	Pass	4♠	Pass
5♦	Pass	7♥	Pass
Pass	Pass		

The lead was a small diamond. Gordon did seem to be on the same wavelength for this is what she saw:

♠94		♠AK76
♥AQT87432		♥K
♦—	W E	♦Q7632
♣QT8		♣AK5

Frieda counted up her tricks: 2 spades, 8 hearts, 3 clubs. That seemed to come to 13 but she checked several times just to make sure. Gordon was going to be proud of her. She ruffed the diamond lead and led a heart to

dummy's king. Disaster! North discarded a diamond. Well, the good news was that the four outstanding hearts were in the South hand. Unfortunately, dummy had only ♥K and so a normal finesse would be impossible. Was there any hope for our heroine? Look to the next paragraph for the happy ending but try to figure it out first. Notice that Frieda didn't use any ace-asking bid – with a void that would not have been very useful.

Frieda must try to reduce her trumps to the same length as South's by ruffing four times in her own hand. She must aim for a two card ending with the lead in dummy. Dummy will contain ♠7 6, South will have ♥J 9, and Frieda will have ♥Q T. When she leads a spade East will be "finessed". This sort of play is called a trump coup. It will only work if South has not managed to ruff one of dummy's winners; so, in this case, it is necessary that South follows to three rounds of clubs and the ♠A K.

Frieda and Gordon found that this hand produced many hours of self-congratulatory post-mortem after the game was over and it seemed to presage a successful partnership. For a start the hand was not easy to bid. It required that Gordon's 4♠ be treated as a cue bid which many partnerships might not have discussed (but what else could it be? Surely not an attempt to improve the contract). This mutual understanding of bidding enabled them to develop a quick rapport.

Another point of interest for the new partnership was the realisation that dummy had the right number of entries to set up 4 ruffs in declarer's hand and finally to enter dummy to execute the trump coup ending. Had the opening lead being either a spade or a heart then it would be vital (and far-sighted) to immediately ruff a diamond: all those opportunities to be in dummy must be utilised to enable declarer to shorten her trumps.

Having discussed this particular hand at length both felt they had come to a greater understanding of both bidding after a pre-empt and of trump coups. They also realised that they had both previously been quite naive about both and they both looked forward to working together to develop their partnership. They parted that night with Frieda inviting Gordon to dinner after Frieda's next trip to Australia.

Chapter 2

The rocky interlude

Frieda Mayer, just back from Sydney, was looking forward to seeing her new partner Gordon Rhode again. She wanted to boast of her play on this hand. She was West, in 4♥, and got the ♠Q lead, seeing these cards:

♠K96		♠AT3
♥QJ52		♥AKT9
♦52	W E	♦QJ764
♣KQT5		♣9

“What would you have done, Gordon?” she said breathlessly.

Gordon waved an imperious hand. “I suppose you let the lead run round to your King and then finessed North for the Jack of Spades” he answered.

Crestfallen, Frieda nodded.

“A far better line is to take the lead in dummy and play a club” continued Gordon. “Then you can discard your spade loser on a high club before they can knock out your other spade honour - you never know the lead could have been from Queen doubleton”. Gordon continued with the same lack of tact. “By retaining the King of Spades in your hand you have another entry into your hand in order to lead towards the diamond honours”.

What do you think of Gordon’s analysis? And should Frieda cancel her dinner date with him?

Actually Gordon, normally technically very sound, was wrong on this occasion. Unable to sleep that night Frieda worked out that Gordon’s line was decidedly inferior because it may require three cards (two clubs and a spade) to be ruffed in dummy. If North captures the ♣K and then leads trumps declarer is trapped in dummy before trumps can be drawn and the opponents may be able to engineer a spade ruff of their own. Bridling inwardly at Gordon’s high-handedness she sent Gordon a curt note.

Her own line – in her humble opinion far better – had been to win the opening lead in hand and immediately play a diamond hoping the diamond honours would split. South won the $\diamond A$ and returned a trump which Frieda won in dummy. She entered her hand with another trump and played another diamond. As hoped for North rose with the $\diamond K$ and continued with the third round of trumps. But now Frieda could take the marked spade finesse, cash a diamond for a club discard, and play a club. The rest was plain-sailing.

As Frieda drifted off to sleep she wondered if she had been rather too harsh on Gordon.

The next day Gordon was feeling rather miserable. Frieda had cancelled their dinner date on the grounds that Gordon had not been sufficiently appreciative of Frieda's play. Things had been going quite well until then, and Gordon had developed a fondness for Frieda that had quite surprised him. He resolved to be more appreciative of Frieda's talents (the bridge ones). He soon had an opportunity when he was dummy and Frieda was declarer (West) in 3NT. North, who had opened $1\spadesuit$, led $\spadesuit 4$. Frieda was looking at:

$\spadesuit AQT2$		$\spadesuit 765$
$\heartsuit KQ5$		$\heartsuit J32$
$\diamond AQ9876$	W E	$\diamond JT2$
$\clubsuit —$		$\clubsuit A876$

Somewhat to Gordon's surprise, when South played $\spadesuit 9$, Frieda played $\spadesuit A$! But it seemed to work out well. Frieda played a small diamond losing to North who, naturally believing his partner had $\spadesuit Q$, continued with another small spade and was surprised when Frieda showed up with that card. Frieda then knocked out $\heartsuit A$ and was home with two spade tricks, 5 diamonds and two hearts.

Gordon was full of genuine admiration. "That was brilliant, Frieda" he enthused. "If you had won the opening lead cheaply, it would have been easy for North to find the club switch when winning the $\diamond K$ ".

Laying it on even more thickly he continued "You obviously worked out that South was marked with at least one club honour or the lead would have been different; therefore it was overwhelmingly likely that North would be deceived".

Frieda gave him a warm smile (not confessing she had pulled the wrong card). "Oh, Gordon, would you like to come to dinner on Saturday after all?".

Chapter 3

The aftermath of dinner

Frieda and Gordon were sitting together on Frieda's comfortable sofa. They had just enjoyed the results of Frieda's excellent cooking, Gordon had insisted on washing up, and they were sharing a rather good brandy.

Frieda was wondering hopefully if Gordon would possibly edge a little closer when he uttered, in rather dramatic tone "Frieda, I want to ask you something".

Frieda's immediate thought was quickly rejected; she and Gordon had only known each other for a few weeks and, well, they were of mature age and certainly not hasty. "Please ask, then, Gordon" she answered, hoping that her voice was steady.

"Frieda, would you,..., would you be my He paused in confusion while Frieda waited expectantly. "Frieda, would you be my partner in the tournament, next month?". He finally got the words out.

Frieda felt a small sense of anticlimax and asked artlessly "But why do you want to play with little old me, Gordon?".

Gordon went a rather fetching shade of pink. "I particularly admired your defence in last Wednesday's game" he said. This is the hand that Gordon was referring to (with Frieda in South's seat, East-West vulnerable, and West the dealer). West opened 1NT and Gordon sitting North doubled.

	♠KQ9	
	♥AQJT974	
	♦2	
	♣A6	
♠J65		♠432
♥K8		♥653
♦AJT4		♦Q93
♣KT95		♣8732
	♠AT87	
	♥2	
	♦K8765	
	♣QJ4	

East passed (no doubt with trepidation) and Frieda passed too (after all she knew Gordon's double was for penalty). West, with a stoic sigh, also passed and Gordon led ♠K. Frieda signalled with the ♠T, Gordon continued with ♠Q and the defence took the first four tricks in spades. Frieda was now on lead and hesitantly advanced the ♣Q. Declarer covered with the ♣K, Gordon won the ♣A and returned a club to Frieda's ♣J.

The excitement was proving too much for Frieda who, having a senior moment, thought they were defending a diamond contract. Hoping for a heart ruff, she led her singleton ♥2. To her surprise, Gordon now took the remainder of the tricks with his long hearts. Down 7 in a doubled contract was of course a top board.

Recalling the hand over their brandy was, naturally, very pleasant but Frieda did feel a twinge of guilt. She admitted to her mental aberration over her heart return hoping that she would not lose Gordon's good opinion.

Impressed by her transparent honesty Gordon smiled broadly. "Frieda, I've had more than my fair share of cows flying by during bridge" he chuckled. "You kindly did not remark on my lapse last week when holding T 8 3 in clubs and declarer played a small club towards dummy's club holding of Q 9 6 3. I had the 'sagacity' to realise that it would be useful to give count. They had just agreed to play reverse count so Gordon prepared to play ♣8 expecting declarer to play ♣Q. And he carried out his sagacious plan even though declarer played ♣9!"

This confession very much reassured Frieda who was aware that Gordon's experience exceeded hers. She smiled warmly at him and squeezed his hand. "I think we shall make a good partnership, Gordon". And the ambiguity hung in the air.

Chapter 4

The post-mortem

The new friends had done creditably in their recent tournament. They had scored below 50% but had had a few unlucky boards. For a first tournament outing it had gone quite well. Meeting for afternoon tea in Gordon's bachelor flat they were looking at hand from the morning session (where Frieda was East and Gordon was West).

	♠J8	
	♥QJT53	
	♦652	
	♣KT5	
♠AQ62		♠953
♥K		♥A862
♦AQ7		♦KJ84
♣J8764		♣92
	♠KT74	
	♥974	
	♦T93	
	♣AQ3	

They recalled the rather strange bidding:

West	North	East	South
			Pass
1♣	Pass	1♦	1♠
2♦	Pass	Pass	Pass

Frieda knew that she had played the hand spectacularly well and was eager to relive the triumph. "South led the ♥9 and, already I knew heaps about his hand" she said proudly.

"What do you mean?" asked Gordon.

"Well", she went on, "Surely that is a doubleton heart since with a sin-

leton North would have had 7 hearts and would have bid. Also, South had overcalled so must have exactly 5 spades since with 6 he would have opened a weak two.”

Gordon certainly agreed with her reasoning so tactfully did not point out that South was a madman who had overcalled on a 4 card suit and made a rather non-standard lead. Encouragingly, he said “And what happened then, Frieda?”.

Frieda remembered very clearly. “I won the heart in dummy, led a small club won by South who played a trump that I won in my own hand. Then I played my remaining club which was won by North. North played their singleton spade which I won with the ♠Q in dummy and I played a third round of clubs, ruffing it with both opponents following. Now I started to count. South began with 5 spades, two hearts, and (I now knew) exactly 3 clubs; so they must have had 3 diamonds to begin with. But that meant that trumps were dividing 3-3. So I could draw trumps, ending in dummy and cash my two established clubs and the Ace of spades. I made 10 tricks for a top board.”

Gordon’s own finest hour had come about through Frieda’s overoptimistic bidding so he was relieved when she herself recalled the hand. “You played that 6NT in the afternoon beautifully, Gordon”, she said fondly (at least, Gordon interpreted her tone as a fond one and felt a frisson of excitement). This time, Gordon was South and the full hand was

	♠AQ75	
	♥—	
	♦8	
	♣AKJT9874	
♠K9643		♠82
♥T93		♥AQ8752
♦J97		♦AQT5
♣Q2		♣6
	♠JT	
	♥KJ64	
	♦K6432	
	♣53	

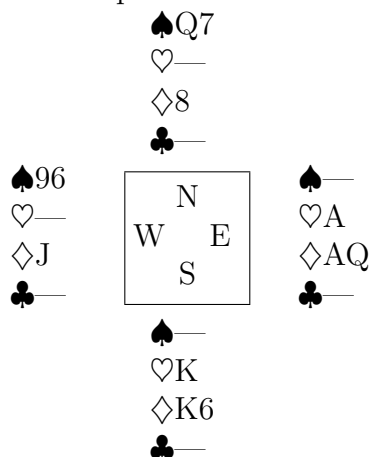
West had been the dealer and the bidding had been

West	North	East	South
Pass	2♣	Pass	2NT
Pass	3♣	Pass	3NT
Pass	6NT	Double	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Frieda would have been the first to concede that her 6NT was an overbid

but she was disappointed that she was not being allowed to play in her magnificent 8 card suit. East's final double was made with some confidence.

Here is how the play proceeded. West led their fourth smallest spade which Gordon ran around to his ♠J. He then played the ♠T, West covered with the ♠K, and dummy's ♠A won the trick. Now Gordon played 8 rounds of clubs on one of which West made the slight error of discarding a spade. This was the position with 3 tricks to go:



On the ♠Q East discarded ♦Q and South ♦6. Gordon now played dummy's last spade. Poor East had lost track of the discards so didn't know which Ace to keep. He discarded the ♦A and West had to give the last trick to Gordon's ♦K.

Memories of their good boards had quite dispelled those of their disasters. They decided to enter the forthcoming A point tournament and to meet regularly from now on to practise their bidding. The suggestion to meet for bidding practice was made by Gordon who was beginning to find many things in Frieda besides her bridge that attracted him. He had been widowed for several years and Frieda's bubbly chatter quite dispelled his loneliness. But he was shy to declare his feelings fearing that Frieda would think him foolish. He would have been surprised to know the real state of Frieda's heart. She was very taken by his courteous old-world charm but her upbringing made it hard for her to give obvious encouragement.

We shall leave our heroes there, hoping that they may find a way past their mutual reticence.

Chapter 5

Another post-mortem

Frieda Mayer was in the airport lounge just about to fly off to Sydney for two weeks. It was the day after the A point tournament, Gordon had driven her to the airport, and they intended to pass the time until boarding analysing their performance. She smiled at him warmly, aware that he had been a little disappointed by their showing, and determined to cheer him up. A little flattery might do the trick she thought to herself. “Gordon, you played really well on that last board in the morning” she trilled. Gordon only grunted morosely. Better lay it on thicker thought Frieda, Gordon seems really down.

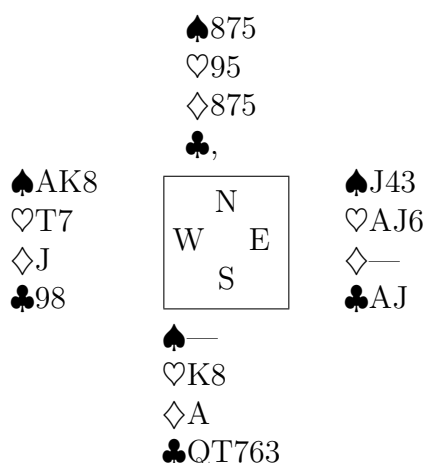
	♠Q875	
	♥954	
	♦Q8752	
	♣4	
♠AKT8		♠J432
♥T73		♥AJ62
♦J96		♦KT
♣985		♣AJ2
	♠9	
	♥KQ8	
	♦A43	
	♣KQT763	

Frieda described how Gordon (East) had played 1NT after receiving the ♣K lead. “It was so clever of you to duck the opening lead” she gushed “If South had continued clubs you would get two tricks in the suit.” Frieda was being disingenuous; she had read about this manoeuvre (called a Bath coup) only last week.

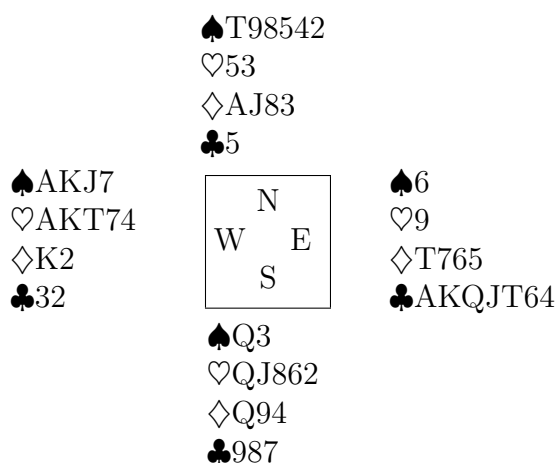
“Hrmmp” said Gordon, perking up a little “that’s called a Bath coup, Frieda, but South didn’t fall for it and switched to the ♦3”.

Frieda continued her account. “You took North’s $\diamond Q$ with your $\diamond K$ and played back a diamond immediately; that was very brave of you. Did you do it to establish a second diamond trick?” This was pure flannel but Gordon didn’t seem to notice. Indeed he now took up the tale.

“South ducked this trick so I led a spade to dummy’s ten. North won his Queen and led a heart that I let South take with their $\heartsuit Q$. This was now the position”:



“You’ll notice, Frieda, that South is now endplayed. Their best course is to cash the $\diamond A$ but they actually played a club. My Bath coup worked in a delayed way. I won two rounds of clubs, then three rounds of spades and put South in with the $\diamond A$. South had to lead away from their $\heartsuit K8$. Gordon seemed quite recovered but Frieda was taking no chances. She next recalled a slam hand where she could plausibly compliment Gordon.



where the bidding had gone (with dealer East, Frieda)

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	2♣	Pass
3NT	Pass	6NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

“Your 6NT bid was a masterstroke, Gordon” she said breathlessly and shamelessly. Quite unaware of Frieda’s ploys, Gordon glowed with pleasure. Since the opening lead had been ♠T the play had been straightforward but he forbore to say how he might have played against a club or a heart lead.

The next board had not been quite as successful. They had bid competently to 6♥ on these cards.

	♠J6	
	♥654	
	♦A832	
	♣Q932	
♠AKT2		♠4
♥AQJ87		♥K92
♦QT75		♦KJ964
♣—		♣KT84
	♠Q98753	
	♥T3	
	♦—	
	♣AJ765	

Unfortunately, North had led ♦A and another diamond for one off. It had been a very poor score since most Norths had not found that lead. However, they agreed that their auction had made it easy for North. Without competition it had been swift:

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	2♦	Pass
6♦	Pass	6♥	Pass
Pass	Pass		

North had deduced that South was short in diamonds and had therefore led ♦A. Gordon manfully took the blame: “I should have passed your ♦6 bid, Frieda”.

To which Frieda replied “You were correctly thinking about match-point scoring, Gordon; I would have bid the same”.

Harmony now ruled.

During the afternoon Frieda had sat North, Gordon South. The first board had not been his best performance.

	♠63	
	♥872	
	♦KT972	
	♣K84	
♠954		♠JT
♥Q6		♥JT543
♦A3		♦QJ4
♣QJ7652		♣AT9
	♠AKQ872	
	♥AK9	
	♦865	
	♣3	

He had been declarer in a rather ambitious 4♠. He had played low in dummy on the ♣Q lead and ruffed the club continuation. Then he'd drawn trumps and played a small diamond. West went up with the ♦A and switched to a heart which Gordon won. "I now made a costly error by playing a diamond to the King" he admitted ruefully.

Frieda stayed tactfully silent; she was now something of an expert on male psychology and realised that fulsome agreement must sometimes be withheld.

"I should have ducked that round of diamonds" continued Gordon. "Then I have an entry to your long diamonds and would easily make the contract."

As so often happens their best board had come about through an opponent's error. A later board in the afternoon had allowed Frieda to use a newly learnt signal.

	♠KQ5	
	♥7	
	♦A93	
	♣KQ8752	
♠AT94		♠8762
♥K6		♥AQ532
♦KQJ654		♦T82
♣3		♣T
	♠J3	
	♥JT984	
	♦7	
	♣AJ964	

Their opponents had overreached themselves and Gordon had doubled East's 4♥ contract after he and Frieda had competed in clubs. He led ♣A and paused to think. Noticing that Frieda had played ♣8 he realised that she was signalling for a spade lead (he had told Frieda that if opening leader

holds the trick but dummy has a singleton then partner signals with a high card if they want the higher of the non-trump suits to be played). Gordon therefore played ♠J and, in due course the defenders collected 800.

Their discussion stayed firmly on the topic of the tournament until . . . “Would passenger Frieda Mayer please proceed to board her Freedom Air flight now departing from Gate 3” boomed the airport sound system. Frieda and Gordon realised that time had sped by and they needed to say their farewells. Screwing up his courage Gordon leant forward to kiss Frieda on the cheek. Simultaneously and unexpectedly she had moved her head while locating her handbag. This resulted in his kiss landing full on her lips. Both sprang back with scarlet blushes. “Oh, goodness me, I must dash” exclaimed Frieda. “See you in two weeks time, Gordon”. She scampered through the gate leaving Gordon nonplussed. Thoughtfully he returned to his car.

Had he offended Frieda? How would he know if he had? Should he apologise? Should he not mention the incident? Life could be so complicated.

Chapter 6

A gift for Gordon

“I really don’t know what to bring back for Gordon” thought Frieda anxiously. She was in a Sydney market and her plane was leaving for Dunedin later that day. She and Gordon had parted under rather ambiguous circumstances and she was unsure how personal a present to buy. Her eye fell on a stall calling itself “Paddy’s Gifts for Gentlemen”. The gifts were pre-wrapped and their contents advertised by phrases such as “To make Dad happy” and “For a keen sportsman”. There was a small package entitled “For men – a personal gift”. That sounded ideal and Frieda handed over her \$20 and hurried off to the airport.

Safely on the plane she recalled with pleasure a hand she had played while she was away; Gordon would be sure to be impressed. Her right-hand opponent had opened 1♣ alerted as showing 16+ HCP. Having a magnificent club suit herself she leapt to 5♣, all passed, her left-hand opponent led the Ace of spades, and Frieda regarded her dummy.

♠87652		♠3
♥—		♥JT92
♦A	W E	♦87654
♣AKQJT76		♣982

At trick two the opponents switched to a trump. It didn’t take long before she formed her plan, a simple one it must be admitted (and she would modestly say so when relating the hand to Gordon). She won the second trick, ruffed a spade, came to her hand with the Ace of diamonds, and ruffed another spade with dummy’s last trump. The opponents had both followed to the third spade so all was well. She ruffed a heart back to her hand, drew trumps, and led her fourth spade. Although her right-hand opponent captured this, Frieda’s fifth spade was now good and she claimed the rest.

Her reverie was cut short by the landing of the plane and she readied herself for seeing Gordon who was meeting her. She told herself that it was essential she appeared warm, yet dignified; pleased to see him but not too effusive; friendly but not embarrassingly eager; assured but not arrogant; enigmatic but not aloof (Oh, get on with it, Frieda, an inner voice called). Certainly, after their last parting, she would need to judge her manner rather exactly.

Gordon greeted her at the gate and she retrieved her little package from her handbag. "It's just a little thing for you, Gordon" she said in a tone that was intended to be rather quiet but actually came out low and sultry. Gordon's thanks were profuse and Frieda eagerly watched as he unwrapped it. As the wrapping paper fell away and the gift came into view, Frieda saw in horror that she had just presented Gordon with a packet of Viagra.

It was obvious to Gordon from Frieda's confusion that her gift of sexual potency was entirely inadvertent. Nevertheless he was knocked off balance and searching around for something humorous to relieve Frieda's discomfort he somehow managed to hit entirely the wrong note: "Thank you, Frieda; when do you think we should try it out?".

This was too much for Frieda who, in the heat of her embarrassment, could not bear even a hint that she might have made an improper proposal. Wordlessly she gathered her luggage and marched off to the taxi rank. Gordon hastened after her with apologetic entreaties but it was to no avail. In an instant she was borne away by taxi leaving Gordon to plod slowly back to his car.

Over the next few days both of them repented of their hasty words (or, in Frieda's case, hasty lack of words) but neither could think of a gracious way of restoring rapprochement. After almost a week Gordon sent Frieda a bunch of spring daffodils accompanied by a saccharine verse of his own composition:

Let's mend our fences, dearest friend
This sorry argument let's end
And so to you these flowers I send.

Frieda, while she welcomed this olive branch, was still too shy to speak to Gordon directly. She therefore replied in kind with a postcard in which she also resorted to verse:

I thank you, sir, for what you wrote
In that apologetic note.
I chose a pot-luck unknown gift
Which caused in us a friendship rift.

I would that we our way could see
To put aside our enmity.

Lovers of the English language will be relieved to hear that no further rhymed nonsense was necessary before Gordon phoned Frieda and she invited him round to tea. He stood somewhat nervously before her front door and rang her bell. The door opened and they regarded each other at the threshold before embracing each other warmly. After a few seconds each became aware that their enthusiastic greeting was being witnessed by numerous passersby – a hardly seemly public display. Frieda was the first to collect herself. “I’m so glad you came, Gordon” she said. Gordon replied “So am I, Frieda”. But he had learnt his lesson and the supplementary phrase “It’s all thanks to the Viagra” which unaccountably came into his mind was mercifully left unsaid.

After their afternoon tea (which Frieda had taken meticulous care with) she broached once more the hand where she had bid and made 5♣. Gordon was effusive in his praise but Frieda perceived an imperceptible pause. She looked at the hands again and realisation dawned.

“Oh yes, I see” she said. “If North had led a trump I would have only been able to ruff only one spade and my contract would have failed (since another trump led after the ♠A was taken would have killed her second ruff).

Gordon had indeed noticed that but he affected a chivalrous response. “By Jove, Frieda, you are right. But I nevertheless commend your bidding and also the way you exploited the defence’s error”.

Frieda was not taken in by this gallantry but felt it was best to pass on to another hand. “I’ve got a remarkable hand to show you, Gordon, where I obtained an absolutely terrible result. Can you bear to see it?”

What could Gordon say but consent with enthusiasm?

Frieda first showed him her own hand: ♠AQJ92 ♥— ♦Q6532 ♣QJ2

“What would you lead against 6♥ redoubled, Gordon?”

Gordon felt a little under the gun so didn’t ask about the auction and ventured “a small diamond, Frieda”.

Frieda smiled and Gordon deduced he had answered as she had hoped. “This was the auction, Gordon, and I was North.”

West	North	East	South
1♥	2♥	Pass	2NT
6♥	Pass	Pass	Dbl
Pass	Pass	Rdbl	Pass
Pass	Pass		

“Are you still leading a small diamond, Gordon?”

Since Gordon had already given what he thought was the answer Frieda

wanted he nodded. Frieda revealed the whole hand¹:

	♠AQJ92	
	♥—	
	♦Q6532	
	♣QJ2	
♠KT		♠8764
♥AKJT9876543		♥Q
♦—		♦KJT9
♣—		♣9754
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠53	
	♥2	
	♦A874	
	♣AKT863	

Gordon could see immediately that dummy's ♦J would be covered by South's ♦A and ruffed. Dummy would be entered with the ♥Q and a spade would be discarded on ♦K.

Gordon was supportively sympathetic but he felt his biggest contribution towards the sympathy pot was to not propose that he would have led a club (the only lead to defeat the contract).

Frieda continued "And of course the extra salt in the wound was that we could have made a rather fortunate 7♣!"

Gordon felt that it was appropriate to say that no amount of preparation could have guaranteed success against such a freak hand but he wanted to do it without sounding trite or patronising. Eventually inspiration struck.

One of his heroes was the ancient Greek Zeno of Citium, founder of the school of Stoicism. With a deep sigh he declared "Sometimes the gods of bridge are against us, Frieda, and the best we can do is move on from our disasters bloody but unbowed."

For some reason Frieda found this lugubrious summation very comforting and, seeing this, Gordon offered the following hand as proof that he himself sometimes performed less than perfectly. He had held

♠— ♥KT98 ♦KJT8653 ♣A2

Clearing his throat he began "I was the dealer and decided the hand was too shapely to pass so opened 1♦. Then my RHO overcalled a weak sp2 and my partner bid 3♠ presumable promising diamond support but just possibly a request for me to show a spade stopper. Thinking that I was being aggressive I leapt to 5♦ which my partner passed but these were the hands".

¹This hand actually appeared at the Otago Club in March 2008. It was discussed by David Green in his book *The Night Sky* (where yours truly is 'the hapless North').

♠—		♠98
♥KT98		♥AQ2
♦KJT8653	W E	♦AQ974
♣A2		♣K96

Ruefully he continued “I know, I know, Frieda, I had nothing to lose by a 4♠ bid and then at least we could have reached 6♦ even if we didn’t bid the lay-down grand”.

Chapter 7

Drawing a little closer

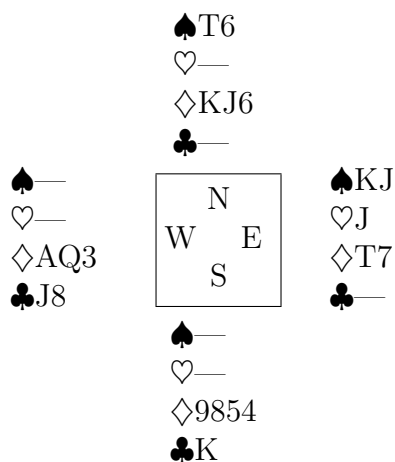
Newly reconciled Frieda and Gordon had played in a Graded Pairs event. This hand from the morning session had given Frieda (East) a particular satisfaction.

	♠T64	
	♥AKQ2	
	♦KJ6	
	♣A96	
♠9752		♠AKJ83
♥4		♥JT875
♦AQ3		♦T7
♣J8432		♣T
	♠Q	
	♥963	
	♦98542	
	♣KQ75	

North was the dealer and the bidding had gone:

West	North	East	South
	1♥	1♠	2♥
3♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

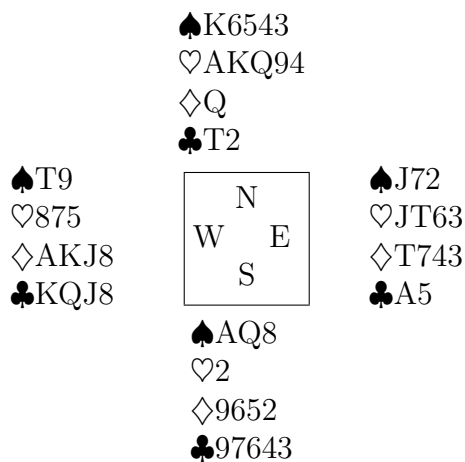
All passed and Frieda, in 3♠, received a heart lead. North won with the ace, cashed ♣A, and played another club. Frieda ruffed, then ruffed a heart, and played one round of trumps (noting the fall of South's queen). From the bidding it seemed that hearts were splitting 4-3 so now she played heart ruff, club ruff, heart ruff, club ruff, heart ruff. That left the following cards:



The lead was now in dummy. She now played the ♣J and a confused North made the mistake of ruffing! Now Frieda overruffed, drew the last trump, cashed ♥J, crossed to dummy with A♦ and won the last trick with 8♣; making 5.

Gordon later quipped that this was ruff luck for the defenders.

In the afternoon session Gordon (North) had enjoyed being declarer in 4♠ on this hand.



The remarkable auction had been

West	North	East	South
	1♠	Pass	2♥
Pass	3♥	Pass	3♠
Pass	4♥	Pass	4♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

It had come off the rails immediately by Frieda's 2♥ bid. Gordon had just offered her a chocolate biscuit and she had suffered an attention-depleting coughing fit. This propelled them rather higher than they would otherwise have bid.

East led a diamond to West's ace and Gordon ruffed the diamond return. Now he established his heart suit before drawing trumps: ♡A, heart ruff, ♠A, ♠Q, diamond ruff, ♠K and now his 3 good hearts. 10 tricks and a very good score.

The event had produced its ups and downs but they had taken to heart a dictum of S. J. Simon: "Don't try for the best possible result on every hand, just the best result possible". Their mixture of pragmatism, discipline, and developing partnership trust was turning them into a formidable couple at the bridge table. Secretly, both hoped to be a couple in another sense of the word but neither knew the way forward.

Chapter 8

Frieda executes an endplay

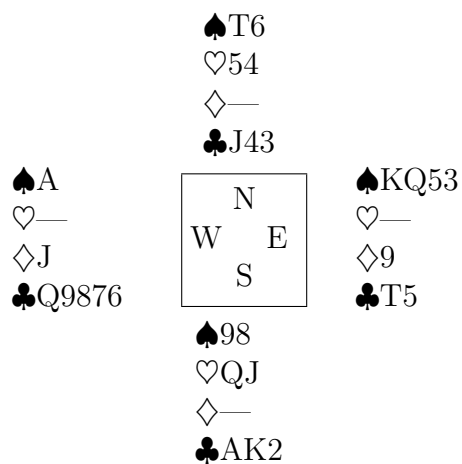
Gordon had just presented Frieda with a book on declarer play and they were seated on Gordon's settee reading the chapter entitled "Throw-ins and end plays". Puzzled she said "I don't understand how anything interesting can be learnt about a hand that you throw in, Gordon".

Gordon, who had read a little further was able to enlighten her. "'Throw-in' means to present your opponent with the lead at such a point that anything they lead will be to your advantage, Frieda".

Frieda sniffed: "Is that all? They should have said so. Remember that hand I played last week?" Frieda, South, had played in 2♥ and the lead had been the ♦K.

	♠T64	
	♥K543	
	♦542	
	♣J43	
♠AJ		♠KQ532
♥T9		♥86
♦KQJT		♦9876
♣Q9876		♣T5
	♠987	
	♥AQJ72	
	♦A3	
	♣AK2	

There appeared to be 8 tricks with no chance of a ninth. But Frieda was inspired. She ducked the first diamond and took the second. Then she drew trumps ending in dummy, ruffed her last diamond, and exited with a spade, won by West with the Jack. This was the position with West on lead.



Unwilling to give a ruff and discard by leading a diamond, and unwilling to play the bare ♠A, West played a club. This allowed Frieda to make her ♣J. She then played two further rounds of clubs and again exited with a spade. Poor West was again thrown in, and now forced to lead a diamond or club, and Frieda got her ruff and discard. So she actually made 10 tricks which gave them a top board.

What is the best defence for East-West? It is not easy to find it at the table. When Frieda exits the first time with a spade, West must play the Ace! Then West plays the ♠J, East cashes two spades and plays a club. There is then no way to come to more than 8 tricks.

Chapter 9

Frieda's unblocking play

Gordon and Frieda were defending a tricky slam contract. The bidding had been swift:

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
6♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

and Frieda, sitting West, led the ♣2. Looking at her feeble collection

♠65 ♥K2 ♦J432 ♣75432

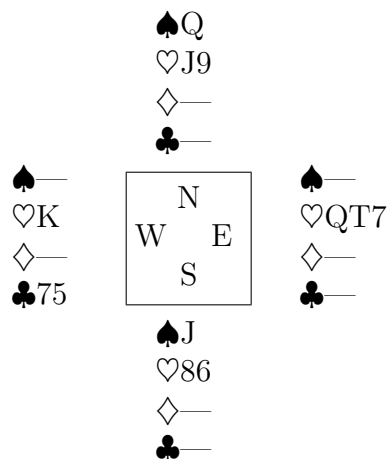
she did not have much hope of defeating the contract. Her only significant card was ♥K. “Better use that to good effect” she thought. So intent on that thought was she that, when declarer casually played the ♥A to the second trick, Frieda accidentally played her King! Realising immediately, she flushed but otherwise remained impassive. The full hand was

	♠QT984	
	♥J94	
	♦A6	
	♣KT9	
♠65	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N W E S</div> </div>	♠32
♥K2		♥QT753
♦J432		♦Q85
♣75432		♣QJ6
	♠AKJ7	
	♥A86	
	♦KT97	
	♣A8	

In due course, the contract failed by one trick much to Frieda's relief. “Brilliant, Frieda” said Gordon.

“Um, thank you, Gordon, I ...”.

Gordon continued. “If you hadn’t thrown your King under the Ace of hearts, declarer would have drawn trumps, cashed the top cards in diamonds and clubs, ruffed a diamond, ruffed a club, ruffed a diamond to get to this position:”



“Then he would have played a heart for you to take with your King and you would have had to concede a ruff and discard. But, since you had discarded your King already, I took the heart and cashed another heart winner”.

Frieda had to confess that her brilliancy was inadvertent hoping that Gordon wouldn’t think less of her. But her honesty and her heart play had quite won his own heart.

Chapter 10

The reward of the anti-hog

Gordon was feeling a little embarrassed. He had just declared five hands in a row and he sensed that Frieda was itching to be other than a dummy. So, on the last hand of the night, when he picked up

♠QJT4 ♥KQJT65 ♦J8 ♣3

and imagined himself playing in a heart contract his own heart fell somewhat. He perked up a little when he heard Frieda open the bidding with 1♦. Nevertheless, it required a conscious effort to pass Frieda's final bid after the auction

West	North	East	South
	1♦	1NT	1♥
Pass	2♣	Pass	3♥
Pass	3NT	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Frieda was sitting North and received the ♠3 lead. Here was her predicament:

♠A86
♥3
♦A9432
♣KQT2

N
S

♠QJT4
♥KQJT65
♦J8
♣3

Hoping to tempt West into playing ♠K, Frieda played the ♠Q from dummy. West however did not oblige and played ♠2. But Frieda had care-

fully analysed the entries to dummy's heart suit; she resisted the temptation to win the trick cheaply and put up the Ace of spades. Now she could establish the heart suit and even though the defence held up the Ace of hearts she could force an entry into dummy via spades. The whole hand was

	♠A86	
	♥3	
	♦A9432	
	♣KQT2	
♠972		♠K53
♥874		♥A92
♦T65		♦KQ7
♣7654		♣AJ98
	♠QJT4	
	♥KQJT65	
	♦J8	
	♣3	

4♥ would have failed and Gordon was in seventh heaven. Not only had they ended with a top board but he felt sure that his unselfish bidding would earn him some personal reward. And so it proved. "I do hope you'll come to dinner on Christmas Day, Gordon; we'll play Sardines". With an arch smile she added "Just the two of us".

Chapter 11

Sardines and the aftermath

On Christmas morning Gordon knocked eagerly at Frieda's front door carrying a bottle of champagne, some Belgian chocolates, and a bunch of red roses. Frieda had promised him a game of Sardines à deux and he felt that his luck was in. On the other side of the door Frieda was in a state of high agitation. She knew that Gordon had taken her humorous suggestion too literally and she wasn't quite sure what to do. In any case she had house guests: Voluptua her 18 year old niece with boyfriend Randy. Voluptua and Randy were embarrassingly demonstrative with their affection for each other and Frieda was finding it difficult sometimes to avert her eyes.

Stuttering Christmas greetings she opened the door to Gordon and explained that they would be four for dinner. Gordon hid his disappointment well and presented Frieda with his offerings. This deeply touched Frieda who, making introductions, opened the champagne and offered it liberally. A pleasant hour passed and all were feeling mellow. Abandoning her reserve Frieda suggested that they should all play Sardines and Gordon's eyes lit up. Frieda volunteered to hide first and after a few minutes Gordon followed in search, champagne bottle in hand. The young folk found themselves alone and repaired to the sofa; this was an opportunity too good to miss.

Gordon meanwhile was opening closet doors and cupboard doors until he heard a sound from Frieda's wardrobe (if truth be told she had recognised his coming and coughed discreetly to announce her whereabouts). On discovering her, Gordon too clambered into the wardrobe as required by the game and there they waited...and waited...and waited. But Voluptua and Randy were occupied with one another.

Fifteen minutes passed and both Gordon and Frieda were feeling the strain of crouching in a confined space each trying not to intrude on the other's personal space but also acutely aware of each other. Eventually Frieda felt a hard object that seemed to emanate from Gordon sticking into her

thigh. In fact it was the champagne bottle but Frieda's speculations were much wilder and she flushed a deep scarlet in the darkness.

"Are you alright, Gordon?" she whispered.

Gordon, whose arthritis was playing him up, answered "I'm a little stiff; am I poking you?".

This did nothing to reassure Frieda who began to shake. Realising something was wrong Gordon reached out to comfort her and dropped the bottle. Suddenly all was clear, her anxieties vanished, and she in turn reached out to him. In a trice they were in each other's arms and there they stayed each hoping that the moment would never end.

Later that afternoon the young Voluptua was feeling rather out of sorts. The surprise of seeing her aunt Frieda entering the living room earlier hand in hand with her friend Gordon had worn off. Instead she was pondering on her boyfriend Randy. They seemed to have one thing only in common and while that single thing was rather pleasant they were both getting rather bored of a continual diet of sensual delights. What could be done to spice up their relationship?

Frieda herself, despite the rosy glow of new found romance, was aware that not all was well with Voluptua. "Why don't you and Randy join the bridge club, dear?" she suggested. The suggestion would certainly have fallen on deaf ears had not Randy entered the room at that moment and said "Oh, Voluptua couldn't play cards for toffee".

Voluptua quivered like cherubic jelly and some very hard words followed. The result was that she resolved to take up her aunt's suggestion, and she threatened to withdraw physical favours from Randy unless he also took up the game.

So it was that the two of them presented their applications to the local bridge club for membership and enrolled in the lessons. In their third lesson Voluptua found herself holding this hand:

♠AKQT9 ♥T ♦AK4 ♣6532

She successfully managed to sort her hand, count her points, and recognise her longest suit. All set to open 1♠ she was somewhat flummoxed to find her right hand opponent (who happened to be Randy, the dealer) making that very same bid. "Double" she proclaimed, confident she could defeat the contract and, at the same time, establish ascendancy in her personal life. To her chagrin, her partner bid 2♥. That ended the auction and they played in their undignified 4-1 fit as Randy smirked irritatingly.

Voluptua was later advised that her only sensible bid initially was "Pass". "What!" she exclaimed "but I had 16 points". "Yes, Voluptua" her teacher explained "However suit doubles at the one level are for take-out, and they generally promise some length in the unbid majors, hearts in this case".

Voluptua wasn't sure she approved of this passive-aggressive behaviour but she still had a point to prove with Randy and did not, for a moment, think of giving up this strange game.

Chapter 12

A lesson for Voluptua

Voluptua was beginning to enjoy her bridge. At the age of 18 it was the first time she had faced a mental challenge greater than deciding on her lipstick colour and she was responding to the competitive element with enthusiasm. Trying to encourage her, her Aunt Frieda had agreed to partner her at a regular game at the club. On the very first hand Voluptua found herself playing (as West) in a ♡6 contract receiving a trump lead.

♠94		♠AQ
♡AJT965	W E	♡KQ432
◇76		◇AQ9
♣AK2		♣Q54

Complaining silently there appeared to be very little ruffing she could do despite the 11 card fit she knit her handsome brows and set about drawing trumps. After 4 rounds she noticed that the opponents had stopped following and decided that no further extraction was necessary. Since, in a recent lesson she had learnt about finessing, her next move was a spade to the queen but, to her anguish, it lost to the king and a spade came back. Another finesse then beckoned. She crossed to her Ace of clubs and played a diamond to the queen.

Once again it was topped by the king and she was one down. With an unladylike oath she rose to her feet. "That was ****ing wild bidding, Aunt Frieda; you put me in a ****ing impossible contract". She was suddenly conscious that the entire room was staring at her and since her aunt had insisted tonight that she wear a knee long skirt and high necked blouse she realised that she had made an exhibition of bad manners rather than immodesty of attire.

With profuse apologies to Frieda and the rest of the room she resumed

her seat and resolved to cultivate a more seemly demeanour. Frieda gamely forebore to explain how the contract was cold realising that Voluptua was in no mood at that time for admonishment.

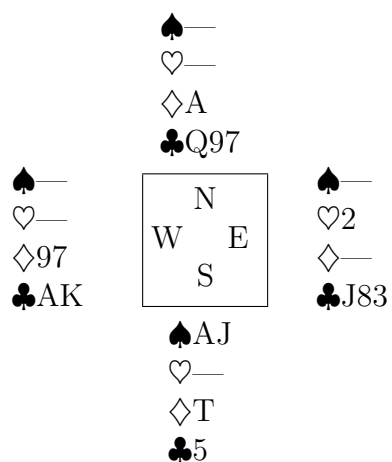
A few days later however Voluptua herself saw how she could have made her contract. As Frieda and now Voluptua had realised all that declarer needs to do is draw trumps and play 3 rounds of clubs ending in her hand. Then a diamond to the 9 endplays South. A club return allows a ruff in dummy and the losing spade to be discarded. A diamond or spade removes the guess in that suit.

And the unspoken lesson that Frieda taught Voluptua? Don't correct or criticise your partner at the bridge table. This was a lesson she never forgot and the very next week she put it into practice when partnering Randy.

They were playing against a pair of club visitors who were on holiday, two very courteous old men who awed the rest of the room as they were leading players on the Polish international bridge squad. Their East player played 6♥ doubled by Randy (North).

	♠KQ3	
	♥4	
	♦AKQ64	
	♣Q976	
♠T976		♠—
♥Q3	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>	♥AKJT87652
♦9753		♦J
♣AKT		♣J83
	♠AJ8542	
	♥9	
	♦T82	
	♣542	

Voluptua was on lead and led ♦2 (as Randy had opened the bidding with 1♦). East ruffed the diamond continuation and led out all his trumps except one to reach this position



Randy had to retain both his diamond winner and his club guard. But now dummy was entered with a top club. Then a diamond was led and ruffed setting up the remaining diamond in dummy. East made it look so easy. Randy flushed with embarrassment while Voluptua radiated serene impassivity. She was looking forward to an interesting post-mortem that night.

Chapter 13

Randy seeks advice

Randy Hardwick was feeling very down in the dumps. His girlfriend Voluptua had become so keen on bridge that she hardly ever nowadays seemed to have time for those non-intellectual pursuits so dear to a 19 year old male youth's heart (for want of a better euphemism). In desperation he had sought the counsel of Gordon Rhode, Voluptua's aunt Frieda's man friend.

"I don't know, Mr Rhode" he said mournfully. "Voluptua seems to have lost interest in ...". His voice tailed off but Gordon guessed what he meant.

Gordon was fully conscious that, in the giving of advice on romantic pursuits, he himself was hardly qualified. Yet, as someone who had suffered in love himself, he wanted to offer the best advice he could. With furrowed brow he mused. "I think you should woo your young lady through bridge" he said. "Shine at the bridge table and you will light a star in her heart". Gordon couldn't help it; he had become hopelessly romantic over the last few weeks and it had addled his normally clear thinking.

"The trouble is" he continued "you are a hopeless player" (tact not being his strong point). "Remember that hand you butchered last week? You went down in a cold 3NT." Gordon swiftly sketched the hands.

♠43		♠AQ65
♥AK7		♥5432
♦KQJT	W E	♦874
♣5432		♣AK

Randy recalled his defeat. "Yes" he said "they led ♦A and continued diamonds. I took a losing spade finesse; South held 6 spades and unkindly returned one so that when she regained the lead in hearts she cashed a bundle of those spades".

"You were unlucky" commiserated Gordon "but you should first have

ducked a heart. You would have found that hearts were 3-3 and your ninth trick would have come in hearts”.

Randy was indignant. “But, Mr Rhode” he expostulated “surely finding 3-3 hearts was a worse chance than the spade finesse working”.

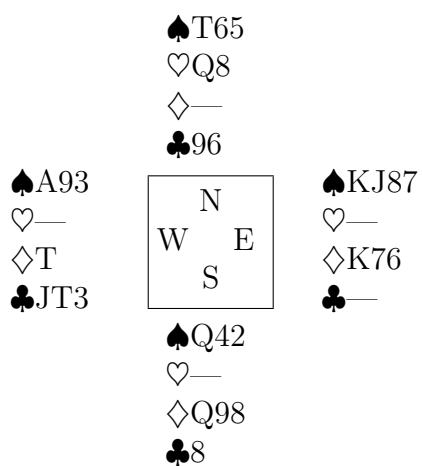
Gordon was indulgent. “That’s true” he said “but you could have fallen back on the spade finesse afterwards if necessary. The way you played gave you no chance to try hearts after spades had failed”.

Randy was desperate enough to try anything and so a slow candle was lit in his resolve. Yes, he would master this game of bridge as a knight masters a fiery dragon; and Voluptua, in sooth, would swoon at his feet. “Mr Rhode” he asked “teach me how to execute finesses with finesse, holdups without delay, and trump management with triumph”. Randy too had been infected by Gordon’s purple language.

So began Randy’s valiant attempt to recapture Voluptua’s physical affections, Gordon postponed bidding tuition until Randy was more competent as a declarer: the only convention that he had taught his aspiring pupil was the 4♣/5♣ ace/king asks. This too little knowledge proved dangerous the first time they played at the club, for the last hand of the night (Randy West and Gordon East) was this one:

	♠T65	
	♥KQ8652	
	♦J	
	♣964	
♠A93	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> WE </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	♠KJ87
♥AT93		♥7
♦AT		♦K762
♣QJT3		♣AK72
	♠Q42	
	♥J4	
	♦Q98543	
	♣85	

North opened the bidding with a weak 2♥. Gordon (East) made the obvious take-out double. Then came trouble as Randy first bid 4♣ for aces and then 5♣ for kings. Receiving good news on both occasions he then bid 6♣ asking (so he thought) for queens! But Gordon took the bid to show long clubs and feeling he had a little extra went on to 7♣. Just then Voluptua came to watch and when North led the ♥K Randy felt under a double pressure. He won the lead, ruffed a heart small, returned to his hand with the ♣Q, ruffed another heart with the ♣K, came back to his hand with the ♦A and ruffed his last heart. With the lead in dummy the position now was



Randy played the ♠J, covered by ♠Q, and won by the ♠A. He drew the remaining trumps and, heart in mouth, ran the ♠9. Success! Rampant with excitement he awaited Voluptua's plaudits. To his chagrin she was adjusting her earrings and had missed his triumph.

Chapter 14

Voluptua's confusion

18 year old Voluptua was vexed. How was it that boyfriend Randy was so engrossed in bridge that he was no longer attentive to her every whim, no longer hanging on her every word and (most hurtful of all) no longer so physically demonstrative in his affections? She was unaware that Randy believed she had become disenchanted with him and was trying to reinstate himself by honing his bridge prowess.

Thinking of how she might once more wrap him around her little finger she had carefully chosen her attire for the weekly bridge where she was scheduled to partner her aunt Frieda. "That skirt is disgracefully short, Voluptua" admonished her aunt as they entered the club, "and that neckline is too revealing".

"Aunt Frieda," countered Voluptua "I had to wear *something*". She was gleeful; evidently she was all set to vamp.

As it happened their first board was against Randy and Gordon. Voluptua was the dealer sitting South (see below).

	♠T6	
	♥763	
	♦AQT832	
	♣64	
♠8543		♠976
♥AKQT98		♥J54
♦4		♦J65
♣Q5		♣KJT9
	♠AKQJ	
	♥2	
	♦K97	
	♣A8732	

Clearly she had to open one of the black suits but which one? Eventually

she decided that she could spend slightly longer leaning across the table drawing an 'S' rather than a 'C' and so, as indecently as possible, she opened 1♠. The bidding, having got off to an unusual start, then proceeded:

West	North	East	South
	1♠	Pass	1NT
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♠
Pass	4♠	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Gordon led ♥A and Voluptua surveyed dummy with some dismay. Indeed she became so flustered that she began the play believing that the contract was 3NT. That explains why she allowed Gordon to win the first three tricks in hearts as she discarded clubs rather than ruffing. At that point she became aware that Randy's gaze was inappropriately directed at exactly where she thought was appropriate and she returned to her senses. Ruffing the fourth heart with the ♠T she drew trumps, ran her diamonds, and emerged with 10 tricks; it was to prove a top. Gordon congratulated her on her excellent trump management and they departed for the next round. "What did you say about rump management, Gordon?" asked Randy.

For the final board of the night and Voluptua and Frieda were once more facing Randy and Gordon. Preparing for the fray Voluptua casually undid one more button from an already revealing blouse; she was determined to attract Randy's attention. An uninspired auction led to Randy (East) declaring 3NT with Voluptua (South) on lead. "All's fair in love and war" thought Voluptua and so, in the pretence of fingering her cards deciding what to lead, she "accidentally" dropped one of them into her capacious cleavage. Randy went scarlet as Voluptua with much wiggling retrieved the card which everyone saw was the ♣K. The director ruled that this was an exposed card (among other things exposed) and it had to be led. When Voluptua saw that dummy was

♠854 ♥T98 ♦43 ♣AQ432

she felt she might have given the contract away. Randy, completely deceived by the entire charade, saw an opportunity to be a gentleman and he therefore played low in dummy. Surely, he thought, Voluptua would reward him for not taking advantage of her error. He played the hand in an anticipatory daze. Winning the diamond switch he cashed all his top winners, found that clubs divided and came to 9 tricks. The score sheet revealed that all other declarers had failed and so he had earned a top. "Not grabbing that ♣A was a very fine play" observed Gordon "you found the only way to play the suit for 4 tricks". The complete deal had been:

	♠T763	
	♥85	
	♦QT82	
	♣JT5	
♠854		♠AK9
♥432		♥AKT9
♦43		♦AJ65
♣AQ432		♣98
	♠QJ2	
	♥QJ76	
	♦K97	
	♣K76	

Voluptua was rather peeved though. In retrospect she had realised that her ♣K lead was actually quite brilliant in tempting declarer to win the Ace (in which case the club suit would have provided 2 tricks only). “How on earth did you find that line, Randy?” she asked. Randy had mixed feelings since the end result was not quite what he had intended and he lapsed into a confused but gracious response. “You found a wonderful lead, Voluptua” said he “and I was fortunate to make the contract despite your breast endeavours”.

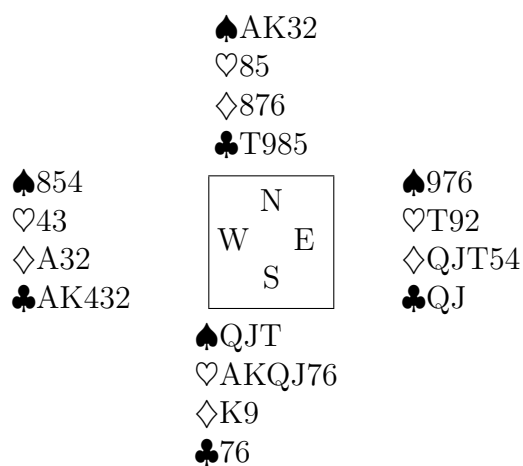
Chapter 15

Voluptua encourages Randy

Voluptua was still under the misapprehension that Randy's former ardour towards her had cooled. Actually the reverse was true and Randy's intentions toward her were not what in former times would have been called honourable. But the poor fellow still thought he had to win her back by becoming a brilliant bridge player. A chance came when, with Frieda and Gordon departing for a romantic weekend *à deux*, the young folk were left to play together in the Graded Pairs tournament.

Evidently some pre-tournament discussion was needed and the subject of carding signals came up. "How will I know that you are encouraging me, Voluptua?" asked Randy. He bit his tongue too late as this question came out but Voluptua was amused by his discomfort. "I'll show you my honours" she giggled. Randy was too embarrassed to take the subject further and they turned up for the first tournament together with no agreement at all on discards and signals.

On the first board Randy (West) led the ♣K against the opponent's 4♥ contract. Voluptua felt that it would be right to encourage the young man but didn't know which of her honours to play. Eventually she parted with the ♣Q and the spotlight now passed to Randy. "Surely" he thought "Voluptua would only waste the ♣Q if it was a singleton so, hoping for a ruff, he led a low club. He was somewhat surprised when Voluptua produced the ♣J but her return of the ♦Q led to to a one trick defeat of the contract. Since most other defenders had begun with both ♣A and ♣K, after which the contract could not be defeated, Randy and Voluptua got a near top. The whole deal had been



Unawares, the two had conducted a defence that would have been found only by an expert pair. Playing the Queen on the lead of the Ace promises the Jack. Partner can then safely underlead their King if he feels that the next lead should come from the other hand. In such a situation an expert West would lead their lowest club to suggest a return of the lower ranking of the remaining suits.

Chapter 16

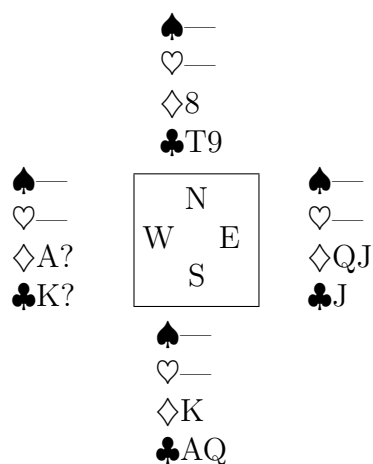
An inconvenient interruption

It was after dinner and Randy and Voluptua were sitting cosily on the sofa in Aunt Frieda's lounge going over the hands from the recent graded tournament. Frieda was away with Gordon in Sydney and Voluptua was house-sitting. Feeling that Voluptua was in relaxed mood Randy was edging hopefully closer thinking that his luck might at last be in.

“Didn't I play this hand well” said Voluptua indicating

	♠AK32	
	♥85	
	♦876	
	♣T985	
♠854		♠976
♥43		♥T92
♦A32		♦QJT54
♣K7432		♣J6
	♠QJT	
	♥AKQJ76	
	♦K9	
	♣AQ	

In point of fact, Voluptua was right although Randy was not in any mood to argue. Voluptua, South, was in 6♥ doubled by West who lead a trump. Voluptua sensed from the confident double that the ♦A and ♣K were poorly placed and had been resigned to defeat. Postponing that evil moment for as long as possible she played off all her hearts and spades (discarding the ♦9 on the fourth spade) and came down to this three card ending



An expert would probably know whether West held ♦A3 and ♣K (in which case Voluptua must play the ♣A) or ♦A and ♣K7 (in which case she must play the ♦K and end play West). However Voluptua was completely unaware of these subtleties and just got it right by chance. Randy was full of effusive congratulations and five rather pleasant and intimate minutes then passed.

But just then the phone rang. It was Frieda. “We’ve arrived at the airport; can you pick us up”’.

“Yes, Aunt Frieda” said Voluptua “we’re just coming”.

Thought Randy: “Chance would be a fine thing”.

Chapter 17

Voluptua enjoys a squeeze

Randy and Voluptua had gone to their first out of town tournament. They were staying in a motel readying themselves for battle the next day. Randy's mind was not on the forthcoming bridge at all but was dwelling salaciously on the prospect of a couple of nights away with Voluptua. Interpreting one of her winning smiles as an invitation to game he tried to finesse her honour. But it turned out that Voluptua was playing reverse attitude signals and a rebuffed Randy spent the night on the couch. Despite this inauspicious start to the adventure the tournament went very well. On the last board Voluptua, South, found herself in 6NT on these hands:

	♠A	
	♥AK6432	
	♦AKT6	
	♣43	
♠QJT765		♠84
♥—		♥QJT987
♦QJ53		♦872
♣Q82		♣75
	♠K932	
	♥5	
	♦94	
	♣AKJT96	

West, who led his ♠Q, was a cocky young man who repeatedly called Voluptua “Darling”. Both she and Randy had taken a hearty dislike to him and Voluptua was hoping for a good result on this hand. She won the spade lead in dummy and immediately played a club to the Jack; it lost, disappointingly, to West's queen who continued with ♠J.

Things looked hopeless with 11 top tricks only. But Voluptua thought she had better take what winners she could so winning the ♠K she played two

top hearts then 5 rounds of clubs (discarding 3 hearts and a diamond from dummy). On the last club West had to choose between throwing his winning ♠T or unguarding diamonds. Retaining his diamond guard he discarded ♠T and so Voluptua's ♠9 became a winner. Amazingly she had made her contract, the slimy West was vanquished and, narrowly, they had won the tournament.

After celebratory drinks they headed back to the motel. As they entered the room Randy complimented Voluptua once more on her magnificent play on the last board. Voluptua was dimly aware of what had happened. "That was a squeeze, Randy" she announced. "I'm just getting the hang of them, and if you play your cards right tonight I'll show you what I mean".

The promise of delights to come hung in the air and Randy was determined not to spoil Voluptua's mood. Feeling that it would not hurt to dwell on another of their good boards he brought up the one on which Voluptua had held a rock-crusher:

	♠QJT8542	
	♥J2	
	♦85	
	♣75	
♠7		♠AK93
♥AK97		♥Q43
♦AK97		♦Q64
♣AKQ4		♣T82
	♠6	
	♥T865	
	♦JT32	
	♣J963	

As West she became declarer in 7NT and North (who had pre-empted in spades) led ♠Q. Voluptua wrinkled her nose; she could only count 11 tricks. With North pre-empting in spades it seemed that the suits might not be breaking well. Dimly recalling that such moments were overcome by experts with a squeeze she tried to remember what Gordon had told her. His voice came back to her: "You have to rectify the count first before the squeeze will operate and that means usually losing an early trick". Here it seemed that to lose a trick would seriously jeopardise her contract so she played to win as many tricks as possible. That meant winning the first trick after which she may as well play another winning spade.

On this trick South paused before discarding a club and Voluptua felt a moment of triumph: he was being squeezed! The triumph was short lived however because she herself was now being squeezed. Better not throw a club because South may have just given up his guard in clubs. But which

red suit to discard? At random she decided to throw a small diamond.

Then she cashed her clubs and diamonds. After that she tackled hearts playing first the ♥A and then the ♥Q. In a flash that showed she really was improving she saw North discard ♥J. But did North have another heart (so play for the drop) or not (so finesse against South). Thinking a bit longer she realised that she knew North had begun with 7 spades and she had watched him play 6 cards of other suits: so he had no more hearts! She therefore knew what to do and wrapped up 13 tricks.

“Count me among your greatest admirers” said Randy, realising that this was the first occasion that either of them had counted out a hand. Voluptua smiled at him and Randy realised his luck was in tonight.

Chapter 18

Enter the Weasel and Ferret

Freida and Gordon were playing the final board of the evening against the Weasel and the Ferret. Their names had been bestowed because both of them were untroubled by consciences, and routinely cheated to improve their chances. Frieda and Gordon had played against them earlier and had done poorly because the Ferret had peered into an unfortunately placed reflecting window pane and glimpsed Frieda's hand. This time the hands were as follows with the Weasel sitting West and Gordon sitting North.

	♠—	
	♥K6	
	♦76432	
	♣AKJT43	
♠AQ63		♠KJT954
♥A873		♥—
♦KQJ		♦AT85
♣98		♣762
	♠872	
	♥QJT9543	
	♦9	
	♣Q5	

The Weasel opened 1♥ and Gordon overcalled 2♣.

“Look at that!” exclaimed the Ferret pointing down the room. Frieda and Gordon both looked around and as they did so the Weasel deftly altered the bidding pad so that Gordon’s bid read 7♣.

Regaining their attention both Frieda and Gordon saw what had happened but had no evidence. Despite a call to the director the 7♣ bid had to stand. The Ferret duly doubled and lead his ♠J on which the Weasel played the ♠A.

Desperate measures were called for and Gordon rose to the occasion. He

ruffed the opening lead and quickly turned his card over placing it in the direction that indicated he had lost the trick; then he waited as though for West to lead. The Weasel was fooled into believing that he had won the trick and, correctly reasoning that his partner was void in hearts, laid down the ♥A.

“Director!” called Gordon. The director ruled that the ♥A was a penalty card that had to be played at the first opportunity.

Now Gordon played three rounds of clubs on the last of which the Weasel was forced to play the ♥A. After that Gordon took seven tricks in hearts and with six tricks in clubs wrapped up his grand slam.

News of the remarkable hand soon filtered around the room and Gordon and Frieda found themselves at the centre of a knot of delighted players who had suffered at the hands of the Weasel and Ferret. As for the villains: they slunk away vowing revenge.

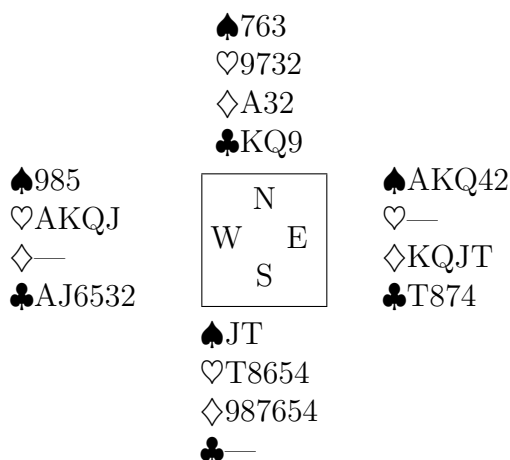
The opportunity for revenge occurred on the last two boards of the evening when Gordon and Frieda were once more facing the dastardly pair. On the first board, the Ferret, sitting South, opened 1♠ and the Weasel, holding

♠QT86 ♥AQ ♦4 ♣876543

had to decide between giving a simple raise or an invitational double raise. Wanting to get across that his hand was worth a bid of about two and a half spades the Weasel found a neat solution: he bid 2♠ but accompanied the bid with a display of the stop card. The Ferret understood completely and jumped to game on otherwise slender values. The contract was unbeatable, no other pair had bid it, and Frieda and Gordon earned a cold bottom.

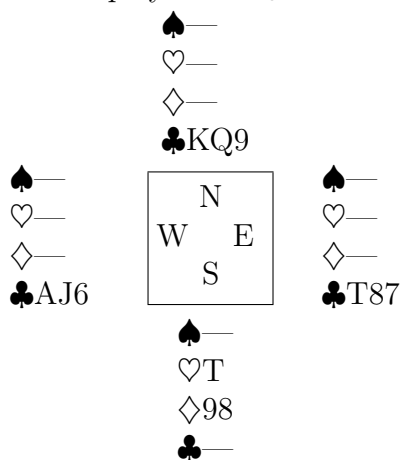
On the second board things didn’t look very bright either for our heroes since Frieda, West, bid to 6♣ and the Weasel, peeking at Frieda’s hand and holding ♣KQ9 behind Frieda’s ♣A, doubled sneeringly.

Seeing dummy after the ♠7 lead, Frieda felt they were heading for another bottom. She thought “This seems to be a reasonable contract; I need only one of the missing club honours to be on my right; but that poisonous Weasel seems to have both of them. How did he know that they were so well-placed? Still I may be able to manage something if the other suits break reasonably”.



Frieda won the ♠A, and played the ♦K. The Ferret went into a huddle, sighing theatrically, and looking skywards, giving the impression of holding the ♦A; finally he played the ♦9. This melodramatic display left Frieda unmoved. She had always intended to ruff and did so with the ♣2.

Then she played a spade to the King and ruffed another diamond. Next came a spade to the Queen and a third diamond ruffed. Now four rounds of hearts the last of which Frieda ruffed in dummy. This was the situation when Frieda played the ♣7 from dummy on which she played ♣J:



The Weasel's goose was cooked. He won with ♣Q and desperately played his ♣9 but dummy's ♣T won and Frieda's ♣A took the last trick.

After the game Frieda, Gordon, Voluptua, and Randy were discussing the evening's bridge. Frieda was jubilant at making 6♣, Gordon gave a scholarly disquisition on trump end-plays and the necessity for trump reduction, Voluptua tried to follow as best she could, and Randy was left to a lustful reverie. He was shaken from his dreams by Voluptua grasping his knee; but his short-lived hopes were dashed on realising that Voluptua simply wanted him to recount her own triumph against the Weasel and Ferret.

Voluptua, West, was declarer in 3NT with the Weasel leading the ♠2

	♠KT92	
	♥K32	
	♦976	
	♣K87	
♠AQ6		♠87
♥54		♥86
♦432		♦AKQJT
♣AQ654		♣JT32
	♠J543	
	♥AQJT97	
	♦85	
	♣9	

Prospects did not appear very bright with the heart suit wide open. The Ferret, South, sensed Voluptua's unease and, in a blatant attempt to put her off, unkindly remarked to Randy "Your girl-friend may be good-looking but she's just a dumb blonde".

This ploy seemed destined to succeed because Voluptua was indeed so flustered that rather than winning the trick with the ♠Q she inadvertently played the ♠A. She then went to dummy with a diamond and ran the ♣J which was won by the Weasel.

At this point the defence could have taken the next seven tricks which, together with the trick they had just taken would have put the contract four down. But Voluptua's accidental play of ♠A made the Weasel believe that the Ferret held the ♠Q. The dastardly Weasel therefore played ♠T and, in a blatant display of the sharp practice for which his name had been won, remarked as though to the room at large "Always return your partner's lead" thereby informing his partner that he held ♠K. His surprise and fury when Voluptua won this with the ♠Q and then ran off 4 more diamond tricks and 3 club tricks (giving her two overtricks) knew no bounds.

Virtue, as usual, had triumphed once again. Randy, however, had other ideas...

Chapter 19

Christmas Day Lessons

Frieda, Gordon, Randy, and Voluptua were consuming brandy and mince pies, the final stage of a large and alcoholic Christmas lunch. All but Gordon were looking forward to an afternoon snooze but he was waxing lyrical about bridge avoidance plays. Realising there was no way to shut him up Randy tried a little joke: “Play second hand high, as you always say, Gordon” he mumbled.

“No, Randy” replied Gordon, “you’ve got it wrong; second hand should play low”.

“High” countered Randy but Gordon wouldn’t rise to the bait. Instead he insisted on showing them this example of an avoidance play in which he had starred as South.

	♠AKT92	
	♥T32	
	♦K76	
	♣97	
♠Q63		♠J87
♥KQ4	W N E	♥J86
♦32	S	♦AJT98
♣T8654		♣32
	♠54	
	♥A975	
	♦Q54	
	♣AKQJ	

The contract had been 3NT and West had led ♦3 (the lunatic sitting East had overcalled in diamonds). Gordon preened himself. “I played low in dummy, East played the ♦8 and I won my queen. Now all I had to do was make a skilful avoidance play: I played a spade and put in the ten from dummy. East took his ♠J but I had protected dummy’s ♦K and now had

4 spade tricks, 4 clubs, the ♡A and my initial diamond trick. I made an overtrick for a top board.”

Randy had not been paying much attention and continued his rather silly jest: “Second hand high, Gordon, as you always say”. Gordon was exasperated but Frieda had noticed something rather interesting.

“Gordon, what if West plays ♠Q at trick 2 – second hand high, as Randy says”.

Gordon was silent, an awful realisation dawning. If the ♠Q is allowed to hold, the diamond continuation is devastating. On the other hand, if the ♠A or ♠K is played, the spade suit cannot be established. In either case, Gordon would be held to 8 tricks.

The final comment was left to Voluptua. Pulling down a rather dishevelled and disgracefully short skirt she murmured to Randy: “Second hand high, second hand low, restrain yourself and wait until later”.

Chapter 20

Voluptua's learning curves

Voluptua was bemoaning to her Aunt Frieda that her declarer play needed improving. “Honestly, Aunt Frieda, I usually don’t understand a word that Gordon is saying”.

Frieda was understanding. “Don’t worry, Voluptua” she said “I also find him very obscure sometimes. Now what would you like to know?”.

“I’ve heard Gordon say something about ‘eliminating your opponents’ ” she replied. “That sounds like a very useful thing to know”.

Frieda laughed. “Gordon would have been talking about eliminating the side suits before giving the opponents the lead” she said. “Then they may have to lead a critical suit and save you a guess; it’s also called stripping the hand and throwing in the opponents” she continued.

Frieda then spent a good hour on coaching Voluptua in this useful technique.

At the next club night, Voluptua was partnering Randy and was looking forward to impressing him in another way (the usual way still being a winner). Their first opponents were the odious Weasel and Ferret. Steadfastly ignoring their lascivious leers, Voluptua (South) bid accurately to a 4♠ contract and received the ♡K lead. Her brow furrowed, Voluptua considered her chances.

	♠KT92	
	♥T2	
	♦J76	
	♣AK93	
♠63		♠87
♥KQJ8		♥76543
♦K32		♦AT98
♣JT85		♣76
	♠AQJ54	
	♥A9	
	♦Q54	
	♣Q42	

"What rotten luck" she thought. "I have nine top tricks but can't ruff anything in dummy for my tenth. If only they had led diamonds I could have established a diamond winner." Then she remembered Frieda's wisdom and a smile lit up her face. She knew exactly what to do. She would win the lead with the ♥A and draw trumps. After that she would play three rounds of clubs and ruff the fourth round. Then she would throw in the opponents with a heart. They would either have to play a heart (or club) for her to ruff in dummy or lead diamonds themselves.

Smiling at Randy she said: "Just watch me strip, Randy".

Randy contained a grin and gravely replied: "I'm looking forward to that, Voluptua; I know you'll do it beautifully". The contract was duly made but Voluptua remained puzzled at the outbreak of mirth all round.

A few days later Voluptua had another chance to test herself against the Weasel and the Ferret. In an attempt to fluster Voluptua, the Ferret sniggered audibly as she fanned her cards; meanwhile the Weasel peered over to see Voluptua's hand.

	♠—	
	♥Q7543	
	♦AQJ62	
	♣943	
♠AKT84		♠QJ2
♥T9		♥86
♦95		♦T3
♣KQJ2		♣AT8765
	♠97653	
	♥AKJ2	
	♦K874	
	♣—	

"Director!" called Gordon. The director arrived and Gordon, who had

misinterpreted the Weasel's head movement, announced with indignation: "Director, this man is trying to look down my partner's blouse". By the time denials had been issued, both Gordon and Voluptua were feeling rather unsettled, and Voluptua was pink with embarrassment. She was South and was the dealer.

Unfortunately, in the confusion, she had mis-sorted her hand and thought that two of her diamonds were hearts. Naturally she opened $1\heartsuit$. Gordon, equally flustered, made the expert bid of $3\spadesuit$ (a splinter bid, promising good heart support and singleton or void in spades). But he had forgotten that Voluptua didn't know about splinter bids. Now it was Voluptua's turn. From her point of view, she had excellent spade support for Gordon and so she leapt to $6\spadesuit$.

At this point Gordon had no option but to bid $7\heartsuit$ and Voluptua, somewhat puzzled, passed.

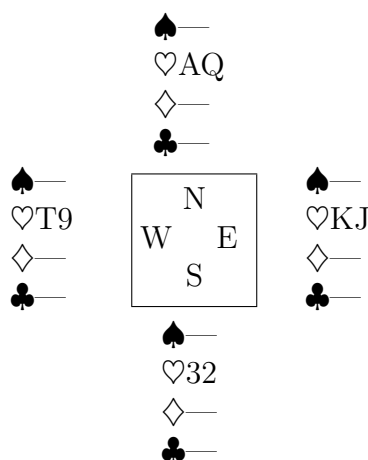
The Weasel led the $\clubsuit K$ and Voluptua was left to play her grand slam missing two Aces. But she now correctly sorted her hand and all was well. She ruffed the lead, entered dummy with a spade ruff and ruffed a second club. Now she went to dummy with the $\diamond A$ and ruffed the last club with $\heartsuit K$. Finally she unblocked the $\heartsuit A$, returned to dummy with another spade ruff, drew the outstanding trumps with $\heartsuit Q$ and ran her diamonds.

The Weasel and Ferret were livid. But Voluptua, suppressing her elation, primly buttoned up her blouse and set off for the bar.

Chapter 21

Wink, wink, nudge, nudge

Voluptua had had a succession of good results against the dastardly Weasel and Ferret who were determined to get their revenge. When they met next in the weekly duplicate the Weasel (South) was in 3NT, had won 7 tricks, and needed the last two to make his contract. This was the situation:



Desperate measures were called for, especially as he had already peeped at Voluptua's hand (East) and seen that the ♥K was off-side. With a shrug he played the ♥3 saying "I'd better take the heart finesse". On hearing this Voluptua prepared to capture the ♥Q with the ♥K, and therefore played the ♥K. Only then, to her dismay, did she see that the Weasel had played the ♥A from dummy! The Weasel rubbed salt into her wound by an obvious and very lewd wink in her direction.

On the second board of the set the Weasel arrived in 4♠ and Randy began the defence by winning the first two tricks with the Ace and King of hearts.

	♠KQT	
	♥65	
	♦K9876	
	♣A54	
♠83		♠AJ
♥AKT943	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>	♥72
♦Q54		♦JT3
♣63		♣QJT987
	♠976543	
	♥QJ8	
	♦A2	
	♣K2	

“That’s a good start” thought Voluptua, and when Randy played a third heart she prepared to overruff dummy who had played the ♠Q.

Just at that point the Ferret (dummy), who had left the table, returned. He saw that there was an impending ruff and ‘accidentally on purpose’ gave Voluptua a hard nudge as he passed. Startled, she dropped the ♣7 on the table. The Weasel, winking at his partner, insisted that she played it.

However, it was now inevitable that Voluptua came to two trump tricks (whereas, had she overruffed the third heart with the ♠A she would only have scored one). The Ferret’s nudge had been costly.

Randy, realising what had happened and spotting a good opportunity, congratulated Voluptua on not overruffing. “That was a very good performance, Voluptua” he remarked “Smooth is better than ‘ruff’ as we both know”. Nudge, nudge, wink, wink seemed to sum up the incident.

Chapter 22

Impending wedlock

Frieda and Gordon were to be married. Gordon had proposed after proudly presenting Frieda with his large cucumber which he had planted lovingly in Frieda's front garden some months before. Voluptua was to be the bridesmaid though the term brideswoman would have been more apt. Randy's official role was to organise Gordon's stag night but Gordon had insisted that a quiet game of bridge was all he wanted. So it was that Randy and Gordon were to be found at the local bridge club. They were doing quite well but it seemed that they needed a good final board. Gordon was West and the auction was very simple:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
Dbl	2♠	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Gordon was on lead and led ♣A. This is what he saw:

	♠K92
	♥652
	♦A98
	♣QJ54
♠83	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W </div>
♥AQ43	
♦6542	
♣AK3	

The ♣A held the trick and, fearing club discards, Gordon then led ♦2. Declarer took this in dummy, ruffed a diamond and then drew two rounds of trumps with ♠A and ♠Q, Randy playing ♠J on the second round. Next declarer played a small club which Gordon took with his ♣K, Randy following suit. The turning point of the hand had been reached. What should Gordon

do now? As it happened, Gordon managed to find the right defence but he had been helped by a declarer error. Before reading on you might like to find it.

By ruffing a diamond declarer had revealed that he had exactly 6 cards in hearts and clubs and therefore that he had no way of discarding all but two hearts. So it was safe for Gordon to continue diamonds (or clubs) and wait for two heart tricks at the end. Without that information Gordon may have thought it was time to cash out.

Most declarers had not given the defence the chance to go wrong so this proved to be a good board for Gordon and Randy. On learning that they had topped the field they ordered a bottle of wine in celebration.

After finishing the bottle they were in no fit state to drive and had to order a taxi. They collapsed in the back seat and mumbled explanations and directions to the driver (“bridge, fun, stag night”). The driver could scarcely understand their slurred speech but picked up “stag night” and “fun” so exercised his initiative. A few minutes later he deposited them outside a house of ill-repute and sped off. There were no telephones in sight and no light visible except in that single establishment. So the night ended with Gordon phoning Frieda with the words: “Drunk, and in a brothel on Bridge street; can you come and fetch us?”

Roused from slumber Frieda gamely found her way to the hapless men-folk. She couldn’t help herself smiling at their plight. So, while she might reasonably have lectured them on their thoughtless behaviour, she decided that it would be a story to bring up when she needed a gentle way of puncturing any pomposity on her future husband’s part.

On the morning of the wedding day the sun shone bright and clear and the ceremony went swimmingly well. No-one had forgotten their lines (despite Gordon’s nightmare of the previous week where he had dreamt he had fluffed a line as “My awful headed wife”). Rather than a traditional dinner and dance reception the bridal couple had decided to have a night of bridge, wine and nibbles. (Somewhat unbelievably, all their friends and relations were keen bridge players). No-one was taking the bridge very seriously and so, when Frieda (West) picked up this monster hand:

♠AQ32 ♥AQ9 ♦— ♣AKQJT9

she decided that everyone was too far into their cups to have patience with a long scientific auction: she simply opened the bidding with 6♣ and awaited Gordon’s dummy with a thrill of anticipation. North led ♦K and this is what she saw.

♠AQ75		♠JT
♥AQ9		♥JT876
♦—	W E	♦A72
♣AKQJT9		♣542

At trick one Frieda faced a knotty problem. Should she discard a heart or a spade on the Ace of diamonds? Which major suit should she finesse in? Would her new husband forgive her for going down? Had she packed suitable nightwear for the honeymoon?

Frieda's mind cleared. She played low in dummy and ruffed the opening lead. Then she drew trumps. Her next move was to play the ♥Q from her hand. It does not help the defence to take this trick since Frieda can win the return, play ♥A, enter dummy with ♥J, and discard her losing spades on the winning hearts and ♦A. The alert defence spotted this, of course, and let the ♥Q hold.

But now Frieda simply played a low spade from her hand. The defence can take this or duck it (in the latter case, Frieda has reached dummy, in the former case Frieda can later enter dummy with a spade play). In both cases the losing heart can be discarded on ♦A and one spade only is lost.

It was a wonderful start to married life and, as news of Frieda's prowess spread around the room, a cloud of confetti was showered over the card table from happy well-wishers. Gordon regaled bridge players and non-bridge players throughout the honeymoon with the story of how Frieda came into his hand after sacrificing her Queen of Hearts. This raised a few eyebrows among non-bridge players but Frieda and Gordon were blissful in their ignorance.

Chapter 23

The unpleasant Americans

Frieda and Gordon’s honeymoon was being spent on a bridge cruise. The weather was perfect and the ship’s food delicious. The only fly in an otherwise perfect ointment was the presence of an American couple. They were Trump supporters who, on learning that Gordon’s sister was a notable reporter in Yemen and very critical of the US policy there, had made it their business to be as unpleasant as possible to the honeymoon couple.

On the whole Gordon and Frieda managed to retain their cool in the face of a barrage of insults, which irritated Mr Delano Sr III and his wife all the more. Halfway through the cruise they met over the bridge table with Gordon, South, declarer in 4♠.

	♠A8432	
	♥K63	
	♦K4	
	♣A84	
♠T	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	♠97
♥T5		♥QJ984
♦QJT987652		♦—
♣J		♣KQT952
	♠KQJ65	
	♥A72	
	♦A3	
	♣763	

Mr Delano Sr III had preempted 4♦ and his wife had managed to convey by a series of sighs that he was definitely not to sacrifice in 5♦ since she was void. Gordon was looking forward to making an apparently easy contract when the ♦Q was led. He covered with the ♦K and Mrs Delano ruffed muttering something about pinko Commie liberals.

There now appeared to be 4 inevitable losers and, even worse, the con-

sequent Delano bragging. Gordon saw one chance. He followed to the first trick with the $\diamond A$! This elicited a scornful rejoinder from Mr Delano about Gordon's inattention. But the last laugh was Gordon's. He won the trump return, drew trumps, and played his two top hearts and the $\clubsuit A$. Then he threw his odious opponent in with a diamond which Mr Delano won with the $\diamond 5$.

With only diamonds left, Mr Delano had to play one proclaiming arrogantly that the "ruff-sluff won't help that *****". Gordon however discarded a heart from dummy and a club from his own hand. Then, when Mr Delano led another diamond, he was able to ruff in dummy and discard his last club so winning the remainder of the tricks and making his contract.

The entire bridge room let out a loud cheer at Gordon's brilliancy which Mr Delano tried to deflect sneeringly "Obvious manouvre, unbeatable contract". But Frieda, with a wide smile merely remarked innocently "Oh, didn't you realise that you only had to underplay your $\diamond 2$ to avoid the throw-in?". With a snarl, Mr and Mrs Delano departed mouthing threats of revenge.

The remainder of the honeymoon bridge cruise was happy and tranquil. They had a wonderful time and their bridge went very well. They had managed to avoid Mr and Mrs Delano Sr III most of the time and the rest of the ship's company was very congenial. On the final night however they had to play the last hand against the Delanos with whom they were running neck and neck for first place on the ship's bridge ladder.

	$\spadesuit J4$	
	$\heartsuit 73$	
	$\diamond KQJT743$	
	$\clubsuit A6$	
$\spadesuit T95$		$\spadesuit A876$
$\heartsuit J982$		$\heartsuit QT6$
$\diamond —$		$\diamond A65$
$\clubsuit T98752$		$\clubsuit K43$
	$\spadesuit KQ32$	
	$\heartsuit AK54$	
	$\diamond 982$	
	$\clubsuit QJ$	

Mrs Delano (North) was the dealer. She bid $1\diamond$ while fingering the ostentatious diamond ring she was wearing. In the Delanos' system that meant a solid diamond suit. Gordon (East) passed awaiting developments. Mr Delano bid $1NT$, an eccentric bid unless you knew that it was forcing. Mrs Delano saw no reason to alert her opponents to this aspect of their agreements and bid $2\diamond$. Mr Delano bid $2NT$, Mrs Delano $3\diamond$, and Mr Delano $3NT$ (the ultimate "husband" bid).

Frieda decided to lead ♠T hoping to strike her partner's suit. Mr Delano covered with dummy's Jack and Gordon won the trick with his Ace. Already the critical point of the hand had been reached. Gordon realised from the bidding that all the outstanding cards were held by declarer.

After half a minute's thought he returned the ♣K sacrificing his club trick. Mr Delano puffed up his shoulders now that he had no club loser and won with dummy's Ace. He now started leading diamonds. However, Gordon held up his Ace until the third round and dummy's magnificent diamond suit was dead as dust.

In due time Mr Delano was held to 8 tricks (2 spades, 2 hearts, 2 diamonds, 2 clubs) and was the only declarer to go down. Frieda was quietly appreciative, it not being seemly to publicly draw attention to Gordon's brilliancy; especially as they would now win the event. The Delanos suffered from no such delicacies and departed muttering imprecations and threats about "bombing Noo Zealand".

Chapter 24

The new member

As a warm winter was giving way to a warm spring the bridge club received a rather odd letter:

Dear Secretary of the Bridge Club

It is my honour to be in communication with you and to beg that, owing to my impending relocation to your area from a few miles south of your esteemed airport, you might countenance an application from me to plight my unworthy destiny in alignment with yours, in short, to join your club.

Yours respectfully

Sinclair Whitlands

The club's committee had never received a letter quite like it and were unsure how to act. Eventually, Frieda made the suggestion that Mr Whitlands might partner her for one game, and she could assess whether he was a bridge player or lunatic (the club not recognising these categories might overlap).

Thus, one Wednesday night at the end of August, Frieda found herself greeting a figure who seemed not to have marked the passing of Queen Victoria. Impeccably attired, razor-sharp creases in his trousers, Sinclair Whitlands would have looked at home in the stately home of a duchess. His bridge skills seemed more up to date but still Frieda had to explain that, nowadays, the weak no trump held sway.

Frieda's anxieties were somewhat set to rest when Mr Whitlands declared 3NT as South after the following auction:

West	North	East	South
		1♥	1NT
Pass	3NT	Pass	Pass
Pass			

A little to everyone's surprise West led ♥K and Frieda anxiously displayed her dummy.

♠54
 ♥A32
 ♦AT9863
 ♣87

N
S

 ♠AK32
 ♥Q64
 ♦KQ
 ♣QJT3

With impassive gravity Mr Whitlands played low on the first trick! It then didn't matter what West led next. Mr Whitlands was soon able to play ♦K, then ♦Q which he overtook with dummy's ace, force out the ♦J, and still have the ♥A entry for the long diamonds.

As Frieda afterwards noted, had Sinclair greedily taken the ♥A at trick one there would have been no way to establish the diamonds and the contract would have failed. However, as a result of her recommendation Mr Sinclair Whitlands was duly admitted to the Bridge Club at the end of September. His bridge playing abilities were still somewhat difficult to assess since his knowledge of modern bidding would have been out of date even in 1975 (when he had last played seriously).

His second game as a new member was with Voluptua (Randy having decided that a rare night of studying was essential). Their hasty discussion before start of play began with Mr Whitlands bowing low to Voluptua, remarking that he was "charmed, Ma'am", which so surprised her that she was rendered uncharacteristically speechless.

As they sat down to play they had agreed only on "natural bidding". The first board revealed some misunderstandings all round. Mr Whitlands was West and the auction was

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	2♣	Pass
4♣	Pass	4♥	Pass
7♣	Pass	Pass	Pass

This was bizarre since the West and East hands were

♠A72		♠K3
♥AK		♥QJ72
♦542	W E	♦AT976
♣AK762		♣Q8

The reader may justifiably wonder what on earth was going on but the explanations are charmingly simple. Sinclair was playing a Goren 16-18 1NT unbeknown to Voluptua. Her 2♣ was Stayman but Sinclair thought it was a suit so, with excellent support, raised to 4♣. Naturally, Voluptua thought this was Gerber and answered 4♥ to show one ace.

Sinclair was now rather perplexed but thought that Voluptua must be showing a good hand so bid a grand slam in her suit (or so he supposed). Even more confused, Voluptua passed and prepared to play holding a doubleton trump alone.

A bemused South led a spade. Voluptua looked pale but drew a deep breath (thereby distracting several passing spectators). She took the lead with the King, played a spade to the Ace and ruffed a spade with ♣8. Then she played ♣Q, crossed to dummy with ♥A, and played two more trumps. Luckily trumps divided 3-3. So now she played the ♥K and crossed to her hand with ♦A. Her ♥QJ won the final two tricks.

Sinclair had watched the play closely, realising that some gremlins had disturbed the auction. “Fortune favours the brave” he declared of his own final bid, adding gallantly “And none but the brave deserve the fair” to which Voluptua blushed prettily. The rather crusty glum old gentleman sitting South caught the full force of Voluptua’s dazzling smile and perked up considerably.

After Sinclair had been a member for several week his air of formal reserve and archaic speech had endeared him to many of the other members of the club, but his manner also prevented anyone getting to know him properly. The first chink in this personal armour appeared one night when he was playing with Randy Hardwick who in age, social skills, and manners was as remote from Sinclair as any other in the club.

Mr Whitlands had observed that Randy was in thrall to Voluptua and had been perturbed about the dastardly Weasel’s insolence towards her before play began (the Weasel was insolent to everyone but he particularly upset Voluptua, and Randy had been too far away to intervene). Halfway through the evening Sinclair and Randy were North-South against the Weasel and Ferret.

“Sir”, said Sinclair, addressing himself to the Weasel “you are a cad and a bounder”. The words were so dated that the Weasel was unsure whether

this was a compliment. Sinclair's indignation so affected him that he rather overbid. He was East and the West-East hands were:

♠AKT9742		♠3
♥T96		♥A7542
♦5	W E	♦AT7642
♣KQ		♣A

The spirited auction was

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♥	Pass
4♠	Pass	6♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		

The Weasel led a low club, and Randy contemplated the dummy with a sinking heart. The only chance appeared to be to find diamonds 3-3 but, even so, there did not appear to be sufficient entries to set them up.

Seeing his partner's discomfort Sinclair murmured: "Play this contract for God, Glory, and Voluptua, my boy". This grandiose encouragement proved effective, for Randy suddenly realised that he could acquire a much needed dummy entry by ruffing his second club honour.

So the play went: ♣A, ♦A, diamond ruff, ruff the ♣K, another diamond ruff (hooray, diamonds fell 3-3); two rounds of trumps (they split 3-2) and another trump which the defenders took. However, diamonds were now established, the ♥A was an entry and all Randy's heart losers thereby disappeared.

Sinclair fixed the Weasel with an unwavering stare: "Sir, a higher power has safeguarded my partner's endeavours; see to it that you renounce your allegiance to the lower powers". For once, the Weasel was speechless.

Chapter 25

Twenty-six points for Randy

Over the holiday period Randy and Voluptua had been very much preoccupied with each other. Voluptua's Aunt Frieda had often stared with vexation at Voluptua's closed bedroom door but tried not to speculate. However on the one occasion they ventured forth to play a holiday game they did very well, helped somewhat by this hand.

Randy declared 3NT as South having been so bewitched by his magnificent hand that all Voluptua's pleas for him to withdraw from the auction were ignored. He received the somewhat fortunate lead of ♠5 but there was still much work to do.

	♠842	
	♥72	
	♦J97542	
	♣Q3	
♠KT653		♠J97
♥A94		♥T865
♦T		♦863
♣T864		♣K97
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
	♠AQ	
	♥KQJ3	
	♦AKQ	
	♣AJ52	

Randy counted his tricks. There were two spades, two hearts (after knocking out the ♥A), three diamonds, and two clubs (after knocking out the ♣K). That make nine tricks, thought Randy with a sigh of relief (he desperately wanted to impress Voluptua).

But wait a minute! His first spade stopper had just been dislodged, and the second would be dislodged when he gave up a trick to ♥A; then, when he lost to the ♣K, the opponents would run a zillion spades.

What could be done? In a testosterone-induced flash the answer came to him. Having captured the first trick with ♠Q he played his three top diamonds. Then, with a masterful smile, he played his ♣J.

The opponents were helpless. In the end, East ducked realising that dummy's diamonds would bring home the contract through the ♣Q entry. But now, with a club trick won, Randy could simply knock out the ♥A and come to his planned nine tricks.

No other declarer had found this line and Randy smugly awaited compliments from his beloved. Voluptua's attention had been distracted by a broken fingernail however, and all she said was "29 points in total and all you could manage was nine tricks?" With an admirable and impassive stoicism Randy went on to the next hand.

Chapter 26

Voluptua's New Year triumph

Voluptua and Randy were playing their first game of the year. The holiday period had been a breathless passionate time and returning to reality had been a jolt. Voluptua had been working very hard on her card play. She had noticed how much Randy had improved and she didn't want to get left behind. So she had been studying the book that Frieda and Gordon had given her for Christmas (101 tips for busy bridge players). Her first chance to shine occurred at the regular club pairs night. On the first board she was West, declaring 3NT after North had dealt and opened 1♠.

	♠Q87652	
	♥A2	
	♦KT9	
	♣QT	
♠J		♠AK43
♥KQJT		♥43
♦QJ432		♦A87
♣AJ9		♣8762
	♠T9	
	♥98765	
	♦65	
	♣K543	

The lead was ♠6 and already Voluptua had a decision. Should she let it run round to her ♠J hoping that North had led from the ♠Q? Since North had bid spades she played low in dummy and was relieved when her ♠J won the trick. Next she played ♦Q which North covered with the ♦K.

“Well, that looks good” she thought. I’ve caught the ♦K. But just before she called for the ♦A she paused. Wait a moment! The ♦A was the only entry to dummy, and there were two top spades there; but, if she cashed them immediately, the opponents might run some spades when they came in

with the ♡A. In any case there was still a diamond to lose before she could establish them.

So, in a moment of pure inspiration (otherwise known as bridge tip 73: keep your entries fluid), she let the ♦K hold the trick. When North played another spade she won with the ♠A, drove out the ♡A, and eventually enjoyed 3 spade tricks, 3 hearts, 4 diamonds, and 1 club. The two overtricks gave her a top score.

But even better was to come for Randy idly asked why she had “given up a diamond trick”. Voluptua was able to explain that she had a diamond to lose anyway; and then she explained about those entries. “But I’m sure you would have played the same, darling” she ended sweetly.

Chapter 27

Up the garden path

Frieda Mayer brushed her teeth, climbed into bed and picked up her book on the gardens of Sussex and Kent. After a few minutes she set it aside and lay musing on the beauty of an English garden. Just then a weary looking Gordon joined her and asked what she was thinking about. Frieda decided that she would have to dissemble; to answer that she had been lying back thinking of England might suggest ideas to Gordon that he seemed too tired to discharge tonight. Quickly she recalled a hand that she and Gordon had played together. The bidding had been as follows with North the dealer.

West	North	East	South
	1♥	Pass	Pass
1♠	Pass	2♥	Pass
2♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

Frieda had been West and had alerted Gordon's 2♥ bid as showing a good passed hand with spade support. Since she was minimal she had made her weakest rebid of 2♠ and this was the lowly contract she played in.

North, thinking no doubt to cut down ruffs in dummy, led ♠A and continued with another spade to which South followed. Contemplating her hand along with dummy, Frieda could only see 7 tricks at first. She had 4 trump tricks, two aces, and could establish a diamond; but that was not enough. What could she do?

♠KQT62		♠J54
♥5		♥A862
♦K73	W E	♦Q42
♣8632		♣A74

One possibility was to hope that clubs were 3-3; then her fourth club

would be a winner. Another was to play towards the $\diamondsuit Q$ (North surely had the Ace) and then duck the next diamond hoping that North held two diamonds only.

But then she spotted an almost certain line: a dummy reversal. So she took the second trick in her own hand, played a heart to the Ace and ruffed a heart. Then she played a diamond towards the Queen (North dare not take the Ace for that would concede two diamond tricks). Having won with the $\diamondsuit Q$ she ruffed another heart. Next came a club to the Ace and she ruffed the last of dummy's hearts with her last trump. That made 7 tricks and she still had the $\spadesuit J$ in dummy for her eighth trick.

Dummy reversals are not all that common and they are usually hard to spot so Frieda had done very well. "You were very clever, my dear" praised Gordon. Indeed, reliving the memory had quite refreshed him and Frieda was looking radiant. "Now" he said, glancing at her book on gardens, "I see you've been thinking of England".

Chapter 28

Minnie van Driver's first game

Miss Wilhemina van Driver made her first nervous entrance at the bridge club in the Autumn. It wasn't that she was nervous because it was her first time; her entrances everywhere were nervous and this was just the first one at the bridge club. Minnie (as her friends called her) was highly strung, of a delicate disposition, inclined to swoon at the merest hint of excitement, but fairly well-preserved for one in late middle age. Her dear Mama had just passed away and, for the first time in her life, Minnie was a free agent. She wasn't sure whether she liked this new freedom though; it would be so much more comfortable to sit at home and read her beloved Jane Austen. Still, Reginald, her nephew, had insisted that she "get out" a bit and see the world. He had taught her the rudiments of bridge, and arranged her membership of the club; but, sadly, Reginald was on business in Auckland and couldn't accompany his Aunt to her first evening at the club. However, he had arranged a partner for Minnie, one Sinclair Whitlands, and Minnie now looked myopically around hoping to find this Mr Whitlands whom she had never met.

She almost jumped out of her skin when a loud voice behind her bade her welcome. "Good evening, exotic flower of Otago, I am Sinclair, your partner for the evening".

Minnie had never been addressed in such colourful terms in her entire life, and she wondered briefly whether she had come in error to a gigolo training school. She stammered her response and waited with trepidation on Mr Whitland's next utterance. "Tender lady, fear not the foes within" (Sinclair nodded his head in the direction of the playing area) "be of good heart and let valour triumph".

As this was her first acquaintance with Sinclair she did not realise that he always spoke as though declaiming heroic epics. She therefore became even more alarmed, and her alarm verged on panic when Sinclair took her firmly

by the arm and led her to Table 3. Trembling she collapsed into the chair, reached into her handbag for her smelling salts, and applied their vapours with the most delicate of white lace handkerchiefs.

Mercifully the first round was a bye and Minnie managed to regain enough composure to agree a simple version of Acol with Sinclair (well, simple for him, seemingly of byzantine complexity to her). As their first opponents sat down to play Minnie's apprehension was still very acute. She did not know what to make of her partner's unconscious impersonation of a chevalier of the Arthurian Round Table. Would this be a disaster of gargantuan proportion, or merely another unhappy episode to haunt her nights of introspection?

Minnie waited apprehensively as her opponents seated themselves and announced a slew of incomprehensible pre-alerts. Unbeknown to her, her opponents were the dastardly Weasel and Ferret who were metaphorically licking their lips (or, as Sinclair would undoubtedly have put it, lubricating their oral orifices) at the prospect of easy pickings.

	♠AQJ52	
	♥AK5	
	♦32	
	♣432	
♠KT43		♠96
♥96		♥J7432
♦AK984		♦J765
♣76		♣J9
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠87	
	♥QT8	
	♦QT	
	♣AKQT85	

Minnie, as South, counted her points. Finding the total to be 14 she beamed. Here at least was a situation she could handle. "1NT" she announced. "Shhh" snarled the Ferret "write it on the bidding pad". Suitably chastened she inscribed "1NT" in beautiful copperplate on the pad. "No, idiot, not on your partner's side" sneered the Weasel.

Eventually, the correct bid was inserted in the correct place. The Weasel (West) scrawled a contemptuous 2♦ and Sinclair (North) had a difficult problem. Eventually he doubled trying to get across the quality of his hand – and the Ferret competed to 3♦.

Now Minnie was one of God's pure simple souls. Not for her were the intricacies of competitive doubles, Lebensohl or all their complex ilk. She imagined that Sinclair's double was showing diamonds and so she tremulously bid 3NT. The Weasel's double could be heard in the street. Fearing the worst, but deciding to trust his partner, Sinclair passed.

As you can see, Minnie should have lost the first 5 tricks. However, the Weasel led a low diamond expecting his partner to have the $\diamond Q$. Minnie's $\diamond Q$ captured the Ferret's $\diamond J$. One of the best parts of Minnie's game was playing off winners and she next played three top hearts and six top clubs.

The Weasel's three remaining cards set him an insoluble problem. He could not retain a top diamond as well as three spades. Hoping his partner held the $\diamond T$ he kept his spade guard and discarded both top diamonds. But now Minnie's $\diamond T$ further squeezed a spade from him and Minnie (who knew a finesses when she saw one) then took the last two tricks in spades. Four doubled overtricks!

Sinclair felt that a little revenge needling of their opponents was justified. "Gentlemen, it was gallant of you to allow my peerless partner to prevail and to purloin but 5 tricks more than perfect defence should permit".

After this uncomfortable first round against the Weasel and Ferret, Minnie had thoroughly enjoyed her first game. Sinclair had tried to explain to her the complexities of scoring but the only piece of his advice that she retained was that the pairs arriving at their table were not their true opponents – these were all sitting in the same direction as her and would not be encountered. This seemed to be a strange concept but it meant that Minnie was able to welcome and chat with each pair that they played against (or "played with" as she now put it to herself) without feeling that she was consorting with the enemy.

So pair after pair were regaled with the story of how her dog had been terrorised by the postman, how her budgie had attacked the neighbour's cat, and how those greedy men from the Council had stolen one of her garden cabbages.

All was sweetness and light until the Weasel and Ferret returned for the last round. Determined to be pleasant, Minnie enquired brightly "How have you found those opponents of ours as you went round?". The Weasel sniffed, the Ferret scowled, and a properly competitive atmosphere descended on the table. Sorrowfully aware that these nasty men were not going to respond to her friendly overtures, Minnie's erratic judgement became even more mercurial. So when Sinclair (North) opened his hand with a rather light $1\diamond$, Minnie propelled the partnership to 3NT. A second later she realised that she would have to play it and a cold panic beset her, which was compounded by a double from the Weasel (West) so vicious that he broke his pencil.

	♠AKQ52	
	♥A52	
	♦T987	
	♣9	
♠JT98	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS</div> </div>	♠4
♥KJT		♥97643
♦AKQJ		♦6
♣76		♣T85432
	♠763	
	♥Q8	
	♦5432	
	♣AKQJ	

The defence cashed 4 diamonds and the Weasel switched to ♠J. Minnie counted her top tricks. There were 8 only but, in error, she came to a total to 9. So thinking that she only had to take her top winners she began to play them out (as her grandmother had taught her years ago in her Victorian parlour). She began by cashing the ♥A and then her 4 top clubs.

She did not know it but she was executing a Vienna coup against the Weasel who could not guard spades and also retain his ♥K. Sinclair, of course, recognised the situation. So when Minnie, pink and breathless, finished taking her 9 tricks Sinclair began whistling a Strauss waltz and danced her around the bridge club. It was an unusual ending to the evening but Minnie was now hooked on bridge and would undoubtedly return.

Chapter 29

A charmed life

Minnie van Driver had been playing at the club for almost a month and was now reliably sorting her cards into suits, rarely revoking, and only bidding out of turn three or four times per session. Even with that improvement it was hard to explain why she was getting such good results. She seemed to lead a charmed life with all her errors leading to inadvertent brilliancies. A typical example was this hand she played in 5♦ as West.

♠42		♠AKJ3
♥T42		♥87
♦KQT72	W E	♦A96
♣KQJ		♣A982

North began proceedings by cashing the ♥A and ♥K and then played a third heart which Minnie had the sense to ruff in dummy. She then played the Ace and King of trumps and noticed that North discarded a small heart on the second trump. “Oh good” she thought, “I must have got all those nasty opponents’ trumps by now”. She had not noticed that South remained with J 8 in trumps (an apparently certain trick since dummy was out of trumps and she couldn’t therefore finesse).

So with the peaceful happiness of one overseen by a fairy godmother she began playing out her clubs. After taking the ♣KQJ she crossed to dummy with the ♠A. These cards remained:

♠4		♠KJ3
♥—		♥—
♦QT7	W E	♦—
♣—		♣A

She now played the ♣A and *ruffed it by mistake*. Very flustered to have “wasted a trump” she next played a spade to the King. Now the lead was in dummy and the cards were

♠—		♠J3
♥—		♥—
♦QT	W E	♦—
♣—		♣—

with South retaining ♦J8. When Minnie played a spade from dummy she was surprised to see South ruff; but she merely over-ruffed and won both the last two tricks.

As her partner Sinclair Whitlands pointed out in admiration she had executed a grand coup. But Minnie displayed only a becoming surprise at being the only declarer to succeed. She had got used to Sinclair’s florid language by now and thought he was talking about someone killing a rather noisy pigeon.

Chapter 30

Voluptua's great unblock

For once Voluptua Stitts was not partnering her boy-friend Randy Hardwick. So when she came to Randy's table her competitive spirit came to the fore and she was very much on her mettle. Sorting her hand she found

♠8 ♥A ♦985432 ♣KQJT9

Randy was North and opened the bidding with 1♥. Voluptua's partner was her aunt Frieda who made a Michaels cue bid of 2♥ showing spades and a minor. Gordon (South) leapt to 4♥ which was a pre-emptive bid with excellent heart support. It was now Voluptua's first opportunity to bid and the level was already rather high. Which minor suit did Frieda have? Eventually she decided on bidding 5♦ thinking that she could correct to 6♣ if Frieda converted to spades. To her immense surprise, Frieda bid 7♦!!

Since Voluptua's hand was a good deal better than she had already advertised she was quietly confident that she would make the contract easily. But then came a fly in the ointment – Randy bid 7♥, an obvious sacrifice.

This was just the irritating sort of thing that her boy-friend was inclined to do. She would not let him get away with it, so looking at her ♥A she firmly bid 7NT.

Randy, looking rather smug, doubled holding

♠KQJ4 ♥KQJ974 ♦— ♣732

This had been the auction:

West	North	East	South
	1♥	2♥	4♥
5♦	Pass	7♦	Pass
Pass	7♥	Pass	Pass
7NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

Randy led ♥K and Voluptua gazed hopefully at Frieda's dummy.

♠8		♠A976532
♥A		♥—
♦985432	W E	♦AKQJT
♣KQJT9		♣A

Oh dear! There seemed no way to make the contract because her magnificent clubs were blocked – and Randy was looking so supercilious. Drat him!

Suddenly the solution came to her, and she turned to Randy with a sweet and pitying smile. On the first trick she unblocked by discarding the ♣A. Then she played off the K, Q, J, T, 9 of clubs discarding her top 5 diamond honours from dummy. This left her with 6 diamond winners in her own hand, plus the ♠8 which was taken care of by dummy's Ace.

The look on Randy's face would be remembered for a very long time. He had, after all led the only suit that gave Voluptua access to her hand. But Voluptua graciously did not point this out.

Chapter 31

Minnie's first tournament

Having played for several weeks in the club Minnie van Driver was beginning to feel a little more comfortable at the table. True, she still needed recourse to her smelling salts when the bidding became too high but her card play was improving by the day. Indeed it had been over a week since she had last revoked and she was now perfectly capable of counting trumps to within a card or two. So when Sinclair Whitlands asked whether she would play a tournament at the club she accepted with just the briefest of heart palpitations.

Their first hand was played against Mr and Mrs Batarde, visitors from Louisiana whose name was a corruption of an epithet that many thought they deserved.

	♠K764	
	♥T83	
	♦AJ2	
	♣AQ3	
♠QT52		♠J9
♥54		♥J62
♦—		♦T9853
♣KJ87642		♣T95
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
	♠A83	
	♥AKQ97	
	♦KQ764	
	♣—	

Minnie, who was South, found herself as declarer in the exalted contract of 7♥ and received a small spade lead. Still shaking from the auction she overcame her near swoon and studied the dummy intently. Everything looked good so long as hearts divided 3–2. She was unaware of the dreadful break in diamonds and counted 2 spades, 5 hearts, 5 diamonds, and a club.

Winning the spade lead in dummy she drew two rounds of trumps to which both opponents followed suit. Overcome by relief she claimed 13 tricks. But Mr Bastarde, East, in a silky unpleasant voice, revealed that he still had a trump outstanding. Minnie was mortified. She even knew of the outstanding trump but had neglected to specify her line of play and so the director was called.

The director, who was somewhat inexperienced and intimidated by the Bastards, ruled that Minnie had to play out the hand without drawing the outstanding trump.

So Minnie played 5 rounds of diamonds ruffing the fifth in dummy. Then she played ♣A, and returned to her hand with ♦K. Holding only trumps now she was allowed to play them from the top and made her contract.

Sinclair noted with great satisfaction that, had Minnie been allowed to draw trumps immediately, she would have gone down because of the 5–0 break in diamonds.

Chapter 32

Basingstoke

In Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta "Ruddigore" there are two married characters Sir Despard and Mad Margaret. When Margaret gets dangerously excited her husband utters the poignant word "Basingstoke"; this sinister name teems with dark meaning to her and calms her down.

Voluptua's partners were despairingly thinking that "Basingstoke" should be used to curb her own flights of fancy. The problem is that sometimes her wild experiments came off and these successes were what she remembered. Recently, playing as West with Gordon (East), who was a wooden paragon of good sense, the bidding was (EW vulnerable):

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♥
4♠	Double	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Voluptua's 4♠ was an outrageous pre-emptive bid but did the job of keeping her opponents out of the cold 6♦. Since 6♦ would score 920 the defence had to take the sacrifice 4 off to score a compensating 1100. Best defence could have achieved this: small club to South's King, diamond to the Ace, ♣A cashed, club ruff, heart to the King, and another club ruff, and then the ♠A. But serene in her confidence, Voluptua did not expect such a sharp defence.

	♠A5	
	♥K6	
	♦AK532	
	♣A976	
♠KQJT87	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS</div> </div> </div>	♠643
♥Q		♥T754
♦9		♦J87
♣QJ532		♣T84
	♠92	
	♥AJ9832	
	♦QT642	
	♣K	

Indeed, the bridge gods smiled on her even as Gordon was imploringly muttering “Basingstoke” under his breath. The actual defence left much to be desired. North led ♥K, which South mistook for a singleton and therefore overtook with the Ace. South then led a low heart back (suit preference for a club return) expecting North to ruff it. However, Voluptua discarded her lone diamond and dummy’s ♥T won! She now played a deceptive ♠T that North ducked and another trump that North won with the Ace. At this point North panicked and led ♣A, dropping her partner’s singleton ♣K. So Voluptua made her contract as her hand was now high.

“You see, Gordon” she laughed afterwards, “you really are far too pessimistic. Enjoy life and have a little fun. It’s not hard, really”.

Chapter 33

Minnie needs glasses

Minnie van Driver was adamant. “My eyes are as good as the day I was born” she declared. Sinclair Whitlands tactfully replied “Yes, yes, revered lady; I only wanted to suggest the possibility of making them even more acute than on that blessed day”. Sinclair always talked as though he was about to slay a dragon but his earnestness brought a flush to Minnie’s cheeks. There seemed no way to persuade her otherwise so Sinclair tactfully changed the subject.

That evening they settled down to play an ordinary pairs event at the club. Their first opponents were the rascally Weasel and Ferret who skilfully bid the North-South hands below to 7♥.

	♠QJ65	
	♥85	
	♦84	
	♣AJ953	
♠AKT7		♠98432
♥J942		♥—
♦T62		♦9753
♣84		♣QT72
	♠—	
	♥AKQT763	
	♦AKQJ	
	♣K6	

Minnie, West, led ♠A and was sorry to see the Ferret ruff it. However then she brightened considerably when she peered myopically at dummy as she could see that she had a sure trump trick. Unfortunately, her optimistic demeanour was noticed by the Ferret and a peek into the reflection in a nearby window confirmed his fears.

What the Ferret did next was not exactly unethical but you, reader, can be the judge. In rapid succession he led to the next three tricks as follows:

♥A, ♥K, ♦Q. Minnie followed twice in trumps but on the next trick she presumed that the Ferret was continuing to draw trumps and thought he had played ♥Q - so she “followed” with ♥9.

The director had to be called who ruled that the Minnie’s ♥9 had to be replaced by a diamond, and that her ♥9 was a penalty card that had to be played at the earliest opportunity. So the Ferret played ♥T next. Minnie had to play ♥9 and her “sure” winner disappeared.

At the end of the evening, Minnie admitted sheepishly “Maybe you are right, Sinclair – I’ll make an appointment for an eye test”. Sinclair beamed. “Dear Lady – the bridge adventure will unfold for you with unerring accuracy once you are armed with an ocular weapon. Your foes will fear you, your prowess will be the talk of the realm, and I, your humble partner, will be the envy of bridge players the world over”. After such a declaration, what could Minnie say?

After a few days Minnie was diagnosed with acute myopia. No-one but her was surprised but, after a few days, she herself came to realise that the diagnosis might be accurate and that it was a relief that she no longer had to maintain the fiction of 20-20 vision.

When the glasses arrived she sustained further surprises in the first week that she wore them. Her house seemed much dustier than usual. On the other hand her garden definitely perked up that week with a large number of new flowers, especially small ones; and the birds in her garden seemed both more numerous and more brightly coloured.

Sitting down for her first hand of that evening’s bridge she was heartened to find that this time she seem to have been dealt a couple of Kings. So often her hands consisted of dreary Jacks – in fact in one recent game she recalled she had had a hand with 6 Jacks. Today however her first challenge was to make 6♥ as West on the lead of ♦A.

♠K64		♠A98753
♥AKQT9874		♥J5
♦—		♦J8
♣J2	W E	♣QT3

Realising that she had been lucky to escape a club lead she was still uncertain what she should do. She had read widely that week - in particular, there had been that helpful article about finding the queen of trumps. What had it said? She reviewed it in her head point by point. But just a moment! She held the queen of trumps herself so that was one problem out of the way. Surely that silly author should have recommended that declarer first checks her own cards.

Now what else? Oh yes! Think before playing to the first trick. Well, she had done that when she was spotting the queen of trumps so that was another success.

Time to play to the first trick. Her partner Sinclair seemed to have set out the dummy cards suit by suit! Why couldn't he have done that last week? That made following suit a breeze. But, oh bother! She couldn't follow suit herself! What should she do?

The solution came to her in an instant – no more than 15 seconds thought – ruff it of course. Looking across the table she detected a twitch in Sinclair's demeanour – naughty man, usually completely impassive, but he must surely be approving of the results of her diligent studies. The unexpected thought of mistletoe popped into her head.

Of course the fate of the contract depended on whether spades divided 2-2. They did and Minnie's night was off to a flying start.

Chapter 34

Voluptua gets mixed up and Randy gets lucky

Voluptua gazed dreamily at Randy. He had just laid down a rather bare dummy and she had the task of making 4♥ as South. But her thoughts were far away from bridge. Randy was looking like a delicious Adonis with his broad shoulders producing very fond feelings in her. Then pulling herself together with a jerk she concentrated on the task at hand, noting that West had led ♥J. This was the deal but, of course, all Voluptua could see was the North–South hands.

	♠83	
	♥A92	
	♦JT52	
	♣KQT3	
♠AQ96		♠J75
♥JT6		♥Q6
♦K764		♦Q983
♣92		♣8765
	♠KT42	
	♥K7543	
	♦A	
	♣AJ4	

She counted her winners: 4 clubs, 1 diamond, probably 4 hearts - only 9 tricks. Where was the 10th trick going to come from? There were several possibilities. She might lead up to ♠K hoping that East held ♠A; or she might try to ruff a spade in dummy. The first of these was a 50% chance; the second seemed doomed to failure by the trump lead for surely the opponents would lead trumps twice more if she lost two spades.

Her forehead furrowed but then her attention began to wander again.

She smiled as she remembered how that week Randy had reversed Frieda's car into the garden hedge; what a dummy he had been reversing like that without looking.

And then it came to her: dummy reversal. All that needed was a 3–2 break in trumps. So she won the opening lead with ♥K, cashed ♦A, and drew a second round of trumps ending in dummy. She then left the outstanding trump out and turned her efforts to another suit. She was able to ruff three diamonds in her own hand, using the clubs as re-entries to dummy (her winners in this strategy were diamond ruff, ♣K, diamond ruff, ♣A, ♣Q, ♣T, diamond ruff). It would not matter if West ruffed one of her club winners for that would promote a trump trick in dummy.

Flushed with pleasure Voluptua made her contract. As Randy praised her efforts she smiled coyly and said “You were an inspirational dummy”. Immediately she wished she said “ymmud” instead but that would have been too hard to pronounce.

In fact the hand helped to build up her confidence for her thoughts had been a bit distracted of late and this had shown itself in rather lack-lustre bidding. Randy had been quite severe with her the week before. “Really, Voluptua, your bidding has been so timid tonight”.

Voluptua had been rather hurt by this remark and had resolved to teach Randy a lesson. So, when her boyfriend (South) opened with a weak 2♠ and East doubled, Voluptua steeled herself. Surely the opponents could make a slam in either minor, possibly even a grand slam. What had Randy called her? Timid? She would show him and with a bold pencil wrote the bid 7♠ on her bidding pad. East doubled, almost breaking the pencil with some unethical pressure, and Randy had to play 7♠ doubled.

West had no trouble finding a lead and placed the ♥A on the table. Voluptua tabled her hand and smiled sweetly and innocently at Randy: “Good luck, partner” she murmured. Randy's face paled as he realised that there were 35 HCP out against him. But squaring those manly shoulders he went to the task.

	♠J9652	
	♥T9765432	
	♦—	
	♣—	
♠Q		♠K
♥AKQJ		♥8
♦QJT7		♦AK32
♣JT82		♣AKQ9762
	♠AT8743	
	♥—	
	♦98654	
	♣43	

He ruffed the lead in his own hand and drew trumps in one round. Then, entering dummy with three minor suit ruffs, he ruffed three further rounds of hearts. Dummy remained with 4 winning hearts and one trump and so could be entered by another minor suit ruff. To everyone's astonishment, his own included, he had made the contract. "That's going to be worth a bit tonight" he thought to himself as he folded his cards.

Randy had been lucky in that, if West leads any other suit, the contract will be two down as dummy would not have sufficient entries to establish the hearts.

Chapter 35

Voluptua in defence

“Anyone can be a good declarer“. Gordon was pontificating as Frieda, Randy, and Voluptua listened respectfully. “Take the following hand where I was North in 4♥; nothing to it. The lead was ♠J won by West who returned a spade; I won, knocked out the king of trumps, and had no trouble taking 10 tricks”.

	♠KQ87	
	♥A8753	
	♦KQ63	
	♣—	
♠A965		♠J4
♥2		♥K64
♦JT974		♦A85
♣754		♣98632
	♠T32	
	♥QJT9	
	♦2	
	♣AKQJT9	

The bidding had been simple

West	North	East	South
	1♥	Pass	2♣
Pass	3♦	Pass	3♥
Pass	4♥	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Not wishing to be too rude of Gordon’s analysis, Randy coughed in embarrassment. “Actually, Gordon, Voluptua and I were sitting East-West at another table and defeated the contract”.

Gordon glared in surprise. “Never” he muttered “lay-down contract”.

Voluptua took up the tale. “Randy led ♠J and I had to decide whether

he was leading a singleton or doubleton. If it had been a singleton, declarer would have had 5 spades and that didn't make sense on the bidding, so it had to be a doubleton. So I prayed that Randy had a trump trick, and the Ace of diamonds; and then I ducked the first trick. Later, Randy scored his ♡K and led another spade to my Ace. I returned a spade for him to ruff, and with the ace of diamonds we took 4 tricks".

"By Jove" exclaimed Gordon, "that was smart thinking young lady". He fell into a reverie trying to redeem his analytical reputation. An hour later he gave a loud "Harrumph" and said "I see you could tell South's shape on trick 1. South had bid hearts before diamonds, and had 4 spades; so must be 4-5-4-0. Playing match-point pairs there is a case for winning the first spade because if Randy did not have a trump trick then South would make an important overtrick. But at teams scoring your defence was perfect". There was a respectful silence.

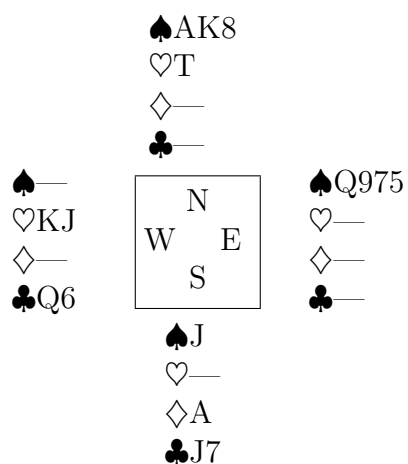
Chapter 36

Randy elopes

Voluptua and Randy had done moderately well in the recent B point tournament helped somewhat by Randy's play in 6♠ as North on the hand below. Many other pairs had been in the slam and no others had made it. The unsuccessful pairs were therefore somewhat mystified both by Deep Finesse's claim that the contract was makable and that Randy had indeed made it.

	♠AK8643	
	♥AT94	
	♦—	
	♣K93	
♠—		♠Q975
♥KJ876		♥Q32
♦9643		♦KJT2
♣Q652		♣65
	♠JT2	
	♥5	
	♦AQ875	
	♣AJ74	

Here is how it was done. East led ♥2 (the best lead) which Randy won with the Ace. Then came heart ruff, ♦A (Randy discarding a club), diamond ruff, ♣A, diamond ruff, heart ruff, diamond ruff, ♣K to reach this position with 9 tricks taken:



Randy now advanced ♥T and East was helpless. Either she ruffed with ♠Q in which case Randy would make the last 3 tricks with his top trumps or she underruffed and then Randy would ruff with ♠J and still come to two more tricks with ♠AK.

Voluptua had observed the play keenly as Randy was so manly when playing a slam contract. She recognised the technique whereby declarer tries to score his own trumps cheaply by ruffing one of dummy's suits as "elopement". Smiling sweetly at her swain she murmured "I love elopements" to which Randy blushed appropriately.

Chapter 37

Ace asking, minor keycard, and you

“Uncle Gordon?” asked Voluptua “may I ask you about ace asking?”. “Hem, hem, dear girl, as one of the club’s leading players, you can do no better than petition me, an acknowledged expert”. Gordon was joking, of course; he was a humble man, and felt that his bridge reputation was over-valued. When this opinion on Gordon’s humility was put to the Weasel the retort had been acerbic and Churchillian “He has much to be humble about”.

But, indeed, Gordon was knowledgeable and wise although certain new-fangled conventions were anathema to him. Voluptua plunged right in, like a low-cut neck-line.

“I’ve spent ages trying to understand Blackwood, Roman keycard Blackwood, Gerber (with or without Roman responses) and now Randy wants me to play something he calls minor keycard”. Voluptua was an intelligent young woman despite looking like a Playboy centrefold, but she was not averse to using her charms to ease her passage through life – and now she turned her innocent wide-eyes on Gordon.

Gordon was very fond of his niece by marriage, and knew her well enough to know that she meant no harm. Didactically, he cleared his throat and began an explanation. “Minor keycard is useful in auctions where you are exploring for slam in a minor suit. In principle, bids $4\clubsuit$ and $4\diamondsuit$ are inquiries about your partner’s holding in the 5 “aces” associated with that suit (the four aces and the king of the suit). The responses are step responses like the responses to Roman keycard Blackwood. In other words after $4\clubsuit$ then $4\diamondsuit$ shows 0 or 3 keycards, $4\heartsuit$ shows 1 or 4, $4\spadesuit$ shows two without the queen, and $4NT$ shows 2 with the queen; while after $4\diamondsuit$ then $4\heartsuit$ shows 0 or 3 keycards, $4\spadesuit$ shows 1 or 4, $4NT$ shows two without the queen, and $5\clubsuit$ shows 2 with the queen”.

“But I don’t understand, Uncle Gordon” protested Voluptua “how do you know when 4♣ or 4♦ are ace- asking or when they are more like invitational or competitive bids?”

“Ah yes; a knotty question indeed” answered Gordon “the answer is quite simple; the bids are ace-asking except when they are obviously not”. Seeing Voluptua’s puzzled face he hastened on. “There will be some competitive auctions where you could not be asking for aces because both your hands have been limited in some way (for example, you pass as dealer and your partner bids 3♦; then 4♦ by you is just raising the pre-empt).”

“Oh, I just can’t see it” pouted Voluptua. “You are so obscure!” Gordon, somewhat miffed, continued hurriedly “The convention is especially useful when playing inverted minors”.

This was too much for Voluptua who drew herself up to her full height and flashed her eyes with pique. “Gordon, I am an adult not a minor and, furthermore, you must know by now that I am an extrovert *not* an introvert.”

Gordon apologised and hastily reassured her by explaining that ‘inverted minors’ was the convention of reversing the two ways of raising your partner’s opening 1♣ or 1♦. His obvious contrition very much mollified Voluptua and the two of them spent an hour further discussing these conventions.

As chance would have it the following deal arose at the next club night when the two of them were partners with Voluptua as West:

	♠T973	
	♥QJ94	
	♦42	
	♣843	
♠KJ4		♠A5
♥AT		♥K85
♦AQJT5		♦K9863
♣A96		♣Q72
	♠Q862	
	♥7632	
	♦7	
	♣KJT5	

With the new tools in her armoury the auction was a breeze:

West	North	East	South
1♦	Pass	2♦	Pass
4♦	Pass	4NT	Pass
6♦	Pass	Pass	Pass

When dummy went down Voluptua was relieved to see that she and Gordon had been on the same wave length. Gordon’s 4NT had shown two key

cards without the Queen. However the contract did not seem impregnable as there might be two losers in clubs. There seemed to be two chances: leading towards the ♣Q might succeed if the ♣K was well-placed; and the spade finesse, if successful, would allow a club discard.

She realised that she could combine her chance by trying clubs first (and if this was unsuccessful fall back on the spade finesse. When the second of these chances succeeded she and Gordon knew that she had mastered what he had taught her.

Chapter 38

The Curse of Scotland

The $\diamond 9$ card is known as the “Curse of Scotland”. It is not certain why it has this name but the two most popular explanations are

1. It was the playing card used by Sir John Dalrymple, the Earl of Stair, to cryptically authorise the Glencoe Massacre. Certainly there is a resemblance between the $\diamond 9$ and his coat of arms.
2. The Duke of Cumberland is supposed to have scribbled the order for “no quarter” to be given after the 1745 Battle of Culloden on a $\diamond 9$ playing card.

Whatever the reason it was a crucial card when Mr Sinclair Whitlands declared $6\heartsuit$ as West after he and Miss Minnie van Driver had bid as follows:

West	North	East	South
$1\heartsuit$	Pass	$3\heartsuit$	Pass
$3\spadesuit$	Pass	$4\clubsuit$	Pass
$5\heartsuit$	Pass	$6\heartsuit$	Pass
Pass	Pass		

This was well-judged bidding. After Minnie’s limit raise the next two bids were cue bids, and Sinclair’s $5\heartsuit$ asked Minnie to bid $6\heartsuit$ if her trump holding was good.

North led $\clubsuit Q$ and Sinclair contemplated a dummy that, for once in Minnie’s bridge life, resembled the hand she had described in her bidding. As was his wont Sinclair gravely complimented his partner. “Expertly bid, dear lady”. Minnie flushed becomingly, her heart palpitating like the heroine in a Victorian drama.

The whole hand was

	♠T6	
	♥T	
	♦K843	
	♣QJT732	
♠AK4		♠532
♥K7532		♥AQ94
♦AJT6		♦972
♣9		♣A86
	♠QJ987	
	♥J86	
	♦Q5	
	♣K54	

Sinclair won in dummy and immediately ran the all-important ♦9 to North's ♦K. North continued with another club. Sinclair drew trumps in three rounds ending in dummy. Now he played another diamond intending to finesse but when South played ♦Q he was able to win with the ♦A, discard a losing spade on the fourth diamond and ruff a diamond in dummy.

Notice that this line would have failed if the ♦9 and ♦8 had been exchanged. But Sinclair knew he had been lucky and that the opponents had misdefended. If South covers the Curse of Scotland the fourth diamond cannot be established for a spade discard.

Chapter 39

Voluptua's strip squeeze

It was the final round of a Swiss teams and, *mirabile dictu*, Voluptua, Randy, Gordon and Frieda were playing at table one. With one hand to go, Voluptua (sitting East) felt that they were slightly behind and that, to win the event, a good result on the final board would be necessary. Their opponents were the dastardly Weasel and Ferret with the Ferret sitting South. This was the bidding:

West	North	East	South
			2♥
3♣	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♦	Pass	6♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		

The Ferret's 2♥ bid was alerted as showing a weak hand with 5 hearts and at least 4 cards in some other suit. The rest of the bidding was natural with Voluptua leaping to 6♠ after Randy had shown a good hand.

	♠5	
	♥J5	
	♦J8532	
	♣KQT84	
♠6		♠AKQJT7
♥T32		♥K98
♦AKQT		♦97
♣AJ962		♣3
	♠9842	
	♥AQ764	
	♦64	
	♣75	

The Ferret led ♣7 and Voluptua studied dummy with some disquiet. In top tricks she had 7 spades, 3 diamonds, and 1 club: 11 only and she needed

a 12th. On the bidding the ploy of leading up to the $\heartsuit K$ was almost certainly going to be unsuccessful. Maybe the $\diamondsuit J$ would come down in three rounds, or maybe she could finesse against South for this card.

Gordon always advised playing off a long suit to see what would happen and so this is what she did. She took the first trick in dummy and started on the spades. On the second round North showed out. Haha! This showed that North must hold 10 cards in the minors (since South was known to have 5 hearts, North could have two only).

After the initial trick and the next 7 rounds of spades, the Weasel (North) had to retain 5 cards. To guard both minors he had to retain 4 diamonds and the $\clubsuit Q$. Reading this perfectly Voluptua played a diamond to dummy and then the $\clubsuit J$. The Weasel took this trick but then had to play away from his $\diamondsuit J$ to concede the remainder.

This was enough to win the match and first prize. Randy, who was a keen student of card play, recognised Voluptua's skill and complimented her. Voluptua smiled sweetly: "yes, a strip-squeeze: would you like to try one later, darling?"

Chapter 40

Coming into his own

Randy Hardwick was beginning to earn quite a reputation as a strong declarer. No-one, not even his girlfriend Voluptua, was more pleased about this than Gordon Rhode. Gordon had spent a lot of time coaching Randy and the young man had responded admirably. Initially his motivation was to win the love and affection of Voluptua but, now that was established, he was really enjoying the challenge of dummy play.

Gordon was watching from the sidelines as Randy declared 7NT as West:

♠2		♠AQ543
♥KQT72		♥A64
♦AKQ76	W E	♦JT
♣AQ		♣753

The lead was a neutral ♦2. Randy counted 10 top tricks (one spade, three hearts, five diamonds, and one club). If the heart suit could be brought in that would be two extra tricks. A thirteenth trick could come from a successful finesse in one of the black suits. Randy began by playing five rounds of diamonds. Both opponents followed three times and each discarded a small club and a small spade. Then he turned attention to the hearts. Realising that he needed either a 3–2 break or South to have four hearts to the Jack he played ♥K and then a small heart to the Ace. North discarded a small spade and so Randy was now able to take the marked finesse and win five heart tricks. These cards remained in his hand and dummy

♠2		♠AQ
♥—		♥—
♦—	W E	♦—
♣AQ		♣7

Two lines of play were now possible: either to take a spade finesse, or to play a spade to the Ace and then take the club finesse. To most declarers this would be a complete guess but Randy considered things more deeply to see if one line had more chance than other.

The most telling thing was that South had begun with exactly six black cards while North had begun with nine black cards. Therefore it was more likely that North was dealt ♠K (and more likely to hold ♣K). That indicated that the spade finesse was a better chance. But, before taking it, Randy cashed ♣A as there was a small chance that South had had to come down to ♠Kx and ♣K. No ♣K appeared so the spade finesse was then taken. It won and the contract was made.

Afterwards Gordon remarked to Frieda: “that young fellow is really coming into his own”. And later that night, in the arms of his beloved, Randy did just that.

Chapter 41

Sinclair and Minnie at Congress

Mr Sinclair Whitlands had managed to persuade his retiring partner, Miss Minnie van Driver, to play in the National Bridge Congress for which they had to travel to a distant city. Persuasion had been difficult because Minnie felt it would be highly inappropriate for them to share a room together, and her modest proprieties had resulted in them having separate rooms in different buildings. Nevertheless they had spent some hours together on the journey north and Sinclair had impressed on Minnie the need for a rather more aggressive style than she was wont to cultivate. So, when this hand arose in the second round of the Open Teams, Minnie took these lessons to heart.

	♠T9853	
	♥QT652	
	♦4	
	♣76	
♠A74		♠KQJ62
♥AJ93		♥K84
♦JT653		♦98
♣K		♣QT4
	♠—	
	♥7	
	♦AKQT2	
	♣AJ98532	

Sitting South as dealer she opened 2NT which, in their system showed both minors. Poor Sinclair! He had little choice but to bid 3♣. The opponents competed in spades and Minnie gamely (even slamly) bid 6♣! After all, wasn't this exactly the sort of courage that Sinclair was trying to engender in her? East doubled thunderously.

Somewhat shaken Sinclair was favoured with the ♠K lead. At least this

was better than a trump lead. Was there anything that could be done? Gritting his teeth, his jaw firm, his gaze resolute Sinclair set about minimising the damage.

The contract was hopeless so all that mattered was not to go to pieces. He ruffed the opening lead and played $\diamond A$ followed by a diamond ruff in his own hand. Then a spade ruff back to dummy and a further diamond ruff (over-ruffed by East) left the defenders scoring two trump tricks (including the ruff) and the $\heartsuit A$. Down 2 for -300, surely a disaster.

But all was well. For their team-mates had played $2\spadesuit$ doubled making!

Sinclair had done well to retain his equanimity. Had he tried to draw trumps before ruffing diamonds he could have been down 4 for -800 and an aggregate loss on the board.

Even before knowing the result Sinclair gravely complimented Minnie on her bid. "A brave bid, fair lady, that only one steeped in courage and judgement would make. My compliments on your fortitude and resolve."

Fortitude and resolve! Words that stirred Minnie's heart. It was the first time she had ever been complimented so gallantly.

Still glowing from Sinclair's compliments she therefore abandoned even more timidity on the next hand.

	$\spadesuit 8$										
	$\heartsuit JT432$										
	$\diamond —$										
	$\clubsuit AQT8763$										
$\spadesuit AQJ65$	<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		$\spadesuit KT932$
	N										
W		E									
	S										
$\heartsuit 6$		$\heartsuit Q7$									
$\diamond J962$		$\diamond K54$									
$\clubsuit 952$		$\clubsuit KJ4$									
	$\spadesuit 74$										
	$\heartsuit AK985$										
	$\diamond AQT873$										
	$\clubsuit —$										

When Sinclair opened the South hand with $1\heartsuit$ she correctly realised the value of her hand and replied with a splinter bid of $3\spadesuit$ to produce the auction

West	North	East	South
			$1\heartsuit$
Pass	$3\spadesuit$	Pass	$4\diamond$
Pass	$5\clubsuit$	Double	$5\spadesuit$
Pass	$7\heartsuit$	Pass	Pass
Pass			

After East doubled Minnie's $5\clubsuit$ Sinclair himself was overcome in excitement and bid $5\spadesuit$ hoping that Minnie would recognise a request for a first

round control in spades. It was of course very foolish to trot out an expert bid like that with Minnie as his partner. But once again fortune favoured the brave. The hapless West led a club in response to his partner's lead-directing double. The losing spade went on the $\diamond A$ and Sinclair came home on the clubs and a cross-ruff.

When they post-mortemed the hand afterwards (by email from their separate bedrooms) Sinclair admitted to his lapse of judgement adding the excuse "Well, they say 6-5 come alive". Minnie found this most confusing. Surely Sinclair had not reached retirement age? And what on earth was he implying? It was blushable stuff but strangely compelling.

Chapter 42

Sinclair and Minnie at Congress again

Following on from their enjoyable first Congress, Sinclair and Minnie had decided to attend another congress almost immediately. Blushingly modest as ever Minnie had arranged for them to have separate rooms at their hotel but a mix-up by the hotel resulted in their actually sharing not only a bedroom but also a large bed. They arrived too late on Friday evening to sort out this disaster. Minnie's over-riding concern was not to be seen by Sinclair in her nightwear as the single anomaly in her otherwise unblemished record of maidenly honour was a liking for sheer silk nighties.

With the impeccable manners of years of good breeding Sinclair agreed to their disrobing in the dark and they settled down to sleep lying as far apart from each other as possible. By a chain of events that is both too far-fetched and unsuitably indecorous to repeat, the morning found them lying in each other's arms with beatific smiles on their faces. For once bridge was not on their minds - and that perhaps explains the strange and uncharacteristic aberration suffered by Sinclair on the first deal of the tournament.

		♠Q985	
		♥AKJ6	
		♦A97	
		♣62	
♠432			♠7
♥9432			♥QT8
♦5			♦KQT8643
♣AKQT5			♣84
		♠AKJT6	
		♥75	
		♦J2	
		♣J963	

The auction had been			
West	North	East	South
		3♦	3♠
Pass	4♦	Pass	4♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Minnie had just learnt about unassuming cue bids but anything as daring as that made her heart palpitate. Sinclair judged that his 7 loser hand didn't warrant a slam try and they settled in game. West led his partner's suit, ♦5.

Sinclair saw that he could make his contract by ruffing two clubs in dummy so long as he didn't draw any trumps at first. Was there anything better? He thought long and hard, badly wanting to atone for his earlier error. Eventually he saw a chance and played as follows:

He won ♦A, cashed ♥A and ♥K, and ruffed a heart in his hand. The fall of ♥Q made his eyes gleam. He re-entered dummy with a trump noting that East showed out. Now he could play ♥J discarding a diamond from his hand and ruff a diamond with the last trump in his hand. This brought him 11 tricks and a good match-point score.

But, best of all, Minnie had followed the play closely even if she had not fully understood his strategy. Her smile of approval was all the reward he needed.

Chapter 43

Happily ever after?

Voluptua and Randy were facing a moment of truth. In a few weeks they were bound for University: she to Auckland, he to Sydney. Both were dreading a bitter parting and they had talked for hours about what they should do. Randy had no doubts about his wishes: he wanted them to remain boyfriend and girlfriend and, who knows, maybe they would eventually settle down together and live happily ever after. While Voluptua also wished for this final outcome, she was fearful that Randy's superiority at the bridge table would lead to future tensions; she wondered whether a clean break now would prevent future heartache. For several weeks now she had been working very hard on her declarer play hoping to allay her inner fears.

The final hand of their very last game before they were to depart for the first semester was a pivotal moment.

	♠8	
	♥AKT842	
	♦87	
	♣J842	
♠AK9		♠QT765
♥J97		♥3
♦Q932		♦JT
♣753		♣AKQT6
	♠J432	
	♥Q65	
	♦AK654	
	♣9	

Voluptua was sitting East and, when North (in third position) opened a weak 2♥ she had to choose whether or how to overcall. Eventually she chose 2♠ after which South bid 3♥. Randy now had a dilemma. Certainly 4♠ was not an outrageous bid but he actually chose the more conservative 3♠.

His thinking was that if Voluptua could make 10 tricks then he could take the blame for underbidding. Whereas if he bid 4♠ and Voluptua failed to make the contract then her confidence in herself would be weakened – and the outcome might push her into a romantic decision that would not be to his liking.

However his careful reasoning was in vain because Voluptua felt that her hand was worth the raise to game and bid 4♠. And when South doubled Randy's heart sank. The full auction had been

West	North	East	South
			Pass
Pass	2♥	2♠	3♥
3♠	Pass	4♠	Double
Pass	Pass	Pass	

South began the defence with two top diamonds as North showed a doubleton. Now if South had played a third diamond the defence would have prevailed but, understandably, he thought this would reveal the adverse trump break; so he switched to his partner's suit and North won the trick to play a second top heart. Voluptua ruffed and paused to think.

On the face of it there seemed to be 10 tricks available via the black suits but then why had South doubled? Voluptua came to the conclusion that South had expected a trump trick and so must hold the guarded ♠J. Backing her judgement she played a spade to the nine and when it held her spirits rose. She cashed ♠A and ♠K noting that North had only a singleton spade as she had expected.

She prepared to take the remainder of the tricks but, just in time, she recalled Gordon's words – "Never stop thinking". What would Gordon do? He was always talking about counting out a hand. Voluptua knew North had 6 hearts for his opening bid, 2 diamonds from his carding, and a singleton spade. Therefore North had 4 clubs and the suit wasn't breaking. So, again screwing up her courage, she made the winning play of a club to her ♣T. When that succeeded she drew the last trump and showed her hand.

The evening had gone well and they had topped the field. The growing confidence that Voluptua had been feeling was cemented by the many compliments of her play on the final hand. So later that night she snuggled up to Randy and whispered "I've got something to say; I think you are going to like it".