

"As Declarer, if (1) Opponents Were *Both Silent Throughout the Auction*, and (2) You Can Only 'Make' Your Contract if Specific Opponents Hold Specific Cards, Play *Assuming that These Specific Cards Are Indeed Held by Those Specific Opponents*"

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

To return to the "Esther Bridge Lessons," CLICK:

<https://esther-bridge.com/index.html>

To return to the "Esther Bridge 'Pop' Quizzes", CLICK:

<https://esther-bridge.com/quiz.html>

Bruce: Today, we are honored to have with us Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will discuss "**As Declarer, if (1) Opponents Were *Both Silent Throughout the Auction*, and (2) You Can Only 'Make' Your Contract if Specific Opponents Hold Specific Cards, Play *Assuming that These Specific Cards Are Indeed Held by Those Specific Opponents***". Well, Esther, thank you for talking to us today!

Esther: D**n it, Bruce! How many times do I have to tell you to **NEVER, ever** call me Esther! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen!

Bruce: Errr, well, very sorry about that, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Well, before we begin discussion of today's topic, would you first talk about what you regard as being the *best book* to read about Declarer's "Play of the Hand"?

© Copyright, Bruce Thompson, 2024. All rights reserved.

¹ As noted in an article in the Winter/Spring, 2024 article in The American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Journal, https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA_1_24.pdf, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen in fact is a hypothetical, and not a real person! So this article was really, really written by **Bruce Thompson**.

Esther: Well, my *Boneheaded Bozo*, of course I will try to help you! I think one of the best books about the "Play of the Hand" is a classic 1934 book, Watson on the Play of the Hand at Contract Bridge by Louis Henry Watson. This book was enlarged and modernized by Sam Fry, Jr. in 1958 and remains "in print" even today.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther, ..err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, could you tell me a little about who this Louis Watson person was?

Esther: Well, my *Beaudacious Bupkus*, Louis Henry Watson² (1906 - 1936) was an extremely accomplished bridge champion. At Columbia he played alongside fellow students San Fry and Oswald Jacoby. Watson was a contributing editor of The Bridge World and the bridge columnist for the New York Evening Post. Watson died young at age 29 of a sudden heart attack on Valentine's Day, 1936.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther, ..err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Now could you give us a couple of bridge Boards that illustrate this important Cardinal Bridge Principle,
"As Declarer, if (1) Opponents Were Both Silent Throughout the Auction, and (2) You Can Only 'Make' Your Contract if Specific Opponents Hold Specific Cards, Play Assuming that These Specific Cards Are Indeed Held by Those Specific Opponents."

Esther: Well, Bruce, the "**BBO Bridge Master**" website³ allows you to declare your skill level, then shows a series of Hands and announces the final contract, each of which you then play as Declarer. At the end of play of each Board you can then request a solution in which the optimal "Line of Play" is discussed *step by step*. The present "Esther Bridge Lesson" Board is drawn from "**BBO Bridge Master**" Level-3 **Lesson A-5**.⁴

² See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_H._Watson

³ See: <https://www.bridgebase.com/v3/app/lv?bridgemaster=>

⁴ The "**BBO Bridge Master**" deals, such as Level-4 **Lesson A-5**, are not fixed. Some of the cards in the deal over repetitious play of the Board change from time to time within the website.

NORTH (8)

S: 4 3 2
H: 4 3 2
D: Q 4 3 2
C: K Q J

WEST (7)

S: 7 6 5
H: K T 5
D: K J T 9
C: T 9 8

EAST (11)

S: K T 9 8
H: A
D: A 8 7 6
C: 7 6 5 4

SOUTH (14)

S: A Q J
H: Q J 9 8 7 6
D: 5
C: A 3 2

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1H	PASS	2H	PASS
4H	PASS	PASS	PASS
PASS	PASS		

WEST leads his Diamond Jack.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther, ...err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. What will happen next?

Esther: Well, my *Simpering Simpleton*, on Trick #1 after WEST leads his Diamond Jack Declarer SOUTH will play the NORTH Dummy Diamond 2, EAST will "duck" with his Diamond 6, and Declarer SOUTH will play his Diamond singleton 5. On Trick #2 WEST will return his Diamond Ten, Declarer SOUTH will play the NORTH Dummy 3, EAST will "duck", and Declarer SOUTH will ruff using his Heart 6.

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what should be Declarer SOUTH's initial "line of play"?

Esther: Well, my *Dandruff-ridden Dufus*, so far both N/S have taken 1 Trick and E/W have taken 1 Trick. Declarer SOUTH can also see 2 more certain "losers": the Trump Heart Ace and the Trump Heart King. Thus, Declarer SOUTH **must** lose no more Tricks or the contract will not "make".

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what **must** Declarer SOUTH *assume* is true in playing to "make" his 4H contract

Esther: Well, Bruce, in order to lose no additional Tricks Declarer SOUTH must assume that EAST holds the Spade King so that Declarer SOUTH can run multiple finesses from the NORTH Dummy toward Declarer SOUTH's Spade A,Q,J. If EAST "ducks" on the Spade lead Declarer SOUTH will play his Queen or Spade Jack from his "closed" Hand and return twice to the NORTH Dummy using Clubs as an "entry". If EAST "covers" with his Spade King, only then will Declarer SOUTH play his Spade Ace. Thus, Declarer SOUTH must *forego* the usual tactic of leading Hearts "low-to-high" from the NORTH Dummy when "drawing" Heart Trump cards, because the NORTH Dummy Clubs **must** be reserved for running the Spade finesse(s) against EAST.

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, doesn't this mean then that Declarer SOUTH must "draw" Heart Trump cards by leading out of his "closed" Hand?

Esther: Well, Bruce, that is indeed *unfortunately* the case! Declarer SOUTH **must** be aware that there are 4 Trump Heart cards "out", and because 4 is an "even" number, the most "equal" "split" is not the most likely "split". The probability of 2-2 "split" is 40.7% while the probability of a 3-1 "split" is 49.7%. If the Trump Heart "split" is indeed 2-2 Declarer SOUTH's play will not matter and Declarer SOUTH will lose *exactly* 2 Trump Heart Tricks. But Declarer SOUTH **must** "protect" his 4H contract against the *slightly* more likely 3-1 "split".⁵

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, should Declarer SOUTH lead his Trump Heart Queen or Jack on Trick #3?

Esther: Well, Bruce, *no, no, no!* Leading "low" on the first Round of drawing Heart Trump cards will work when *either* Defender has a *singleton Honor* in the Heart Trump cards. There are 8 possible 3-1 "splits":

⁵ If the Heart Trump "split" is 4-0 Declarer SOUTH will not "make" his 4H contract.

	WEST	EAST
1.	A	K T 5
2.	K	A T 5
3.	T	A K 5
4.	5	A K T
5.	K T 5	A
6.	A T 5	K
7.	A K 5	T
8.	A K T	5

In **4** of the **8** "splits" (**#1, #2, #5, and #6**), **50%** of the 8 "splits", Declarer SOUTH leading his "lowest" Trump Heart, the Heart 6, will "drop" either the Opponents' Ace or the King, on a Trick that E/W will certainly *in any case* "win". In "split" **#3** Declarer SOUTH's Heart 6 will be won by WEST's Ten, and neither the Heart Ace nor Heart King will "drop". In "split" **#7** if WEST plays "second Hand low", again neither the Trump Heart Ace nor King will "drop". So in **4** of the **8** "splits" (**50%**) leading "low" will *both* (1) "drop" E/W's certain "winner", and (2) "promote" Declarer SOUTH's Trump Heart Queen and Jack.

In **4** of the **8** "splits" (**50%**, *definitely* "split" **#3** and "split" **#4**, and *possibly* "split" **#7** and "split" **#8**) Declarer SOUTH leading his "low" Trump Heart 6 will not "drop" either the Trump Heart Ace or the Heart King. However, in "splits" **#3** and **#7** leading the Trump Heart 6 will at least "drop" the E/W Heart Ten.

However, Declarer SOUTH leading the Trump Heart 6 in any case at least will afford WEST the inopportune *opportunity* to play "second Hand high". And leading the Trump Heart 6 on splits **#5** and **#6** also affords E/W the *opportunity* to "drop" both the Trump Heart Ace and King on the same single Trick which E/W will "win" no matter which Trump Heart Declarer SOUTH leads.

Summary

On this Board once the NORTH Dummy comes down Declarer SOUTH can see that he will only make his **4H** contract "iff" (if and only if) both of **2** things are true:

1. The Trump Heart "split" is either 2-2 or 3-1 and not 4-0, and
2. EAST holds the Spade King so that the Declarer SOUTH can repeatedly "finesse" from the NORTH Dummy towards his "closed" Hand's Spade A,Q,J.

Therefore, Declarer SOUTH **must** assume that both these 2 things are true. If *either* of them is not true, the contract will fail. But if both things are indeed true, Declarer SOUTH will make his contract *only* if he *assumes* both things and plays accordingly.