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**“‘All Is Fair in Love and War and Bridge’ :
As Bridge Declarer It May Be
Vital to Sometimes Be Intentionally Deceptive”**

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

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Editor’s Note. In 1578 British author John Lily published Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit followed in 1850 by Euphues and His England. From Lily’s fictional character, Euphues, the term, “euphemism” was then derived. The proverb, “*All is fair in love and war,*” is attributed to Euphues. Esther has taken some liberties with Lily’s proverb and now has recast it as, “*All is fair in love and war and bridge*”.²

Bruce: Today, we are honored to have with us Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will discuss “‘**All Is Fair in Love and War and Bridge’ : As Bridge Declarer It May Be Vital to Sometimes Be Intentionally Deceptive**”. 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, would you begin by explaining what you mean when you say, “intentional deception”?

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¹As 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**.

² See the Wikipedia entry, “Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit”:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euphues:_The_Anatomy_of_Wit

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course I will try to help you! Bridge players certainly must bid and play in accord with the ACBL Laws of Duplicate Bridge!³ For example, if a card has been led to you and you hold a card in the led Suit you **must** "follow" Suit. But you can legally play any card you hold in the led Suit. For example, if an Opponent leads the Ace of Hearts and you as Declarer hold K,4 of Diamonds it is perfectly "legal" for you to play your Diamond King on this Trick! Indeed, as I am going to argue in this "Esther Bridge Lesson" there are situations in which doing so might be a *highly shrewd* bridge play.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther, ...err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, oh my goodness!

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will try to help you. *Fasten your seat belt, please!* First, however, I must advise you that the ideas presented in this lesson are derived from **Tip #1** (pp. 7-10) in David Bird's 2005 book, *52 Great Bridge Tips on Declarer Play*. The bridge Boards presented here are also derived from Bird's book, but I have altered some of the Hands.

David Bird is a very highly regarded British bridge writer. He has authored more than 140 bridge books and has claimed that he is the most prolific bridge author of all time. He also is the bridge correspondent for both the Mail on Sunday and the London Evening Standard newspapers. He also over 30+ years has authored in Bridge Magazine a series of humorous bridge stories about fictional bridge-playing monks in the fictional St. Titus Monastery.

³ See: <https://web2.acbl.org/documentlibrary/play/Laws-of-Duplicate-Bridge.pdf>

Dealer: **EAST**

NORTH (11)

S: K 8 3
H: J 7 4
D: Q J 7 2
C: A 8 5

WEST (7)

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

EAST (8)

S: --
H: A K T 9 8 5 3
D: 9 8 6
C: J 7 4

SOUTH (14)

S: A Q T 7 6 5 4
H: Q 2
D: K 4
C: K 3

Bidding

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
3H	3S	PASS	4S
PASS	PASS	PASS	

WEST leads his Heart 6 toward his Partner's bid Suit.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther, ..err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Certainly, EAST will play one of his "top" 2 Heart Honors. And certainly, you *must* agree that Declarer SOUTH must play his Heart 2 on Trick **#1**.

Esther: Well, Bruce, I am not so certain about that! EAST holds 7 Hearts. WEST has played 1 Heart. And once the NORTH Dummy comes down EAST can see 3 Hearts in Dummy. So EAST sees that WEST cannot initially have held Q,2 of Hearts or WEST would have first led his Heart Queen. WEST initially either held the Heart 6,2 doubleton or the Heart 6 singleton. EAST expects that he will be able to take at least 1 more Heart "winner" and then give WEST a Heart ruff. But Declarer SOUTH also sees the potential dangers here.

Bruce: So, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, isn't Declarer SOUTH *completely helpless* to prevent these Heart "losers" from happening?

Esther: Well, Bruce, there may be an "off" chance that EAST can be dissuaded by Declarer SOUTH from taking another Heart "winner" on Trick **#2**. First, Declarer SOUTH expects from

his opening preempt 3H bid that EAST holds the Heart A,K and that both his Heart Q,2 Hearts will be "toast"! So Declarer SOUTH must play his Heart Queen on Trick #1! Furthermore, Declarer SOUTH can also see that the NORTH Dummy "protected" Heart Jack will be "promoted" into a "winner" even if Declarer SOUTH "drops" his Heart Queen on Trick #1! Here is what Bird had to say about this "line of Play":

"A better idea is to follow smoothly with the ♥Q at [T]rick one. If East reads this card as a singleton, he will be reluctant to play the ♥A next... He may decide to switch to a [D]iamond instead, *letting the contract through*. There is not much point trying to analyze whether East [on Trick #2] should lead a [D]iamond or his other top [H]eart at [T]rick two. The point [instead] is that he is certain to get it right *unless* you drop the ♥Q [on Trick #1]. Do this and give East a problem. Sometimes he will go wrong." (p. 8, all emphases added)

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, is this *really* a *sensible* way to play bridge?

Esther: Yes, it is, Bruce. A superordinate **CARDINAL BRIDGE PRINCIPLE** is:

"Whenever possible, especially if it costs you *nothing*, do *every single thing* possible to give your Opponents the opportunity to do something *dumb*. Often, they will not. But at least be gracious enough to give them the opportunity to make mistakes!"

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, can you give us another example of using legally-permissible deception to optimize your bridge results?

Esther: Well, Bruce, sure. Here is another example from Bird's 52 bridge "tips" for Declarers. Notice by the way that this is the #1 "tip" of his 52 "tips", which is possibly not just a coincidence! I have altered both the bidding and some of the cards in these Hands.

Dealer: **EAST**

NORTH (7)

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

WEST (5)

S: T 9 4
H: A J 7 4
D: 7
C: T 7 6 5 3

EAST (6)

S: 7 6
H: T 2
D: A Q T 9 8 4 2
C: 9 4

SOUTH (22)

S: A K Q J 8
H: K Q 6
D: K 5
C: K J 2

Bidding

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
3D	DBL	PASS	3H
PASS	3S	PASS	4S
PASS	PASS	PASS	

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, WEST on Trick #1 led his Diamond 7 singleton. The NORTH Dummy came down. What happens next?

Esther: Well, the Declarer SOUTH immediately saw that "the contract was *doomed* if he followed with the ♦3. East would give his [P]artner a [D]iamond ruff and in the fullness of time the defenders would surely score two [H]eart [T]ricks. He therefore dropped the ♦K under East's [A]ce. Indeed, once East had failed to cash his ♦Q (or play a lower [D]iamond) at [T]rick two the contract *could no longer be beaten.*" (p. 9, italics added).

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Can you give us a 3rd example of using deception as Declarer to improve your bridge results?

Esther: Well, sure, Bruce. Sometimes as Declarer playing Suit contracts you use deception to persuade Opponents that you now or soon will hold a void in a side Suit. But sometimes *instead* one Opponent initially held a singleton but you as Declarer wants to persuade the *other* Opponent that it is

you as Declarer who holds a singleton. Consider the following slightly-modified Board.

Dealer: **SOUTH**

	NORTH (10)		
	S: 5 4		
	H: A J 7 3		
	D: J 5 2		
	C: K J 7 2		
WEST (4)		EAST (11)	
S: K J 9 7 3		S: Q T 6 2	
H: 6 2		H: T 4	
D: T 8 6 4 3		D: K Q 9	
C: 3		C: A 8 6 4	
	SOUTH (15)		
	S: A 8		
	H: K Q 9 8 5		
	D: A 7		
	C: Q T 9 5		

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1H	PASS	3H	PASS
4H	PASS	PASS	PASS

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. WEST leads his Club 3. The NORTH Dummy comes down. How would you play?

Esther: Well, Bruce, Declarer SOUTH sees 8 Clubs held by N/S, including 4 of the top 5 Clubs missing only the Club Ace. EAST is going to take Trick #1 with his Club Ace and then is likely to return WEST's Club lead for a possible ruff. But can you persuade EAST that WEST instead initially held multiple Clubs? Bird suggested that, "One possibility is to play the ♣J from [D]ummy, giving the impression that you do not hold the [Q]ueen or {T}en in your [H]and. You can then follow with the ♣9, *painting a picture of ♣Q-10-5-2 with West...* If East does place his]P]artner with four [C]lubs to the [Q]ueen, he will be reluctant to lead back into [D]ummy's ♣K-J-7, which might [then] give you two discards. So, *don't give up when you fear the opening lead is a singleton.* By playing judiciously to the first trick, you may end up hearing that sweetest of sounds: [WEST saying,] 'Why didn't you give me my ruff, [P]artner?'" (p. 10, emphases added)

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, it sounds like at least in bridge deception can be a *good* thing?

Esther: Well, Bruce, as they say, "*All's fair in love and war and bridge!*" As the ACBL Laws of Bridge Law 73.E, "Legal Deception" says,

"A player may appropriately attempt to deceive an opponent through a call or play as long as the deception is not protected by concealed partnership understanding or experience."