

"As Declarer in a Suit Contract 3 Ways to Take Care of Your 'Losers' "

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 talk us through "**As Declarer in a Suit Contract 3 Ways to Take Care of Your 'Losers' "**". Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, thanks for taking the time to be with us today!

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

Bruce: Errr, well, sorry again about that, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther.

Esther: Well, Bruce. Please try to exercise at least a modicum of empathy, assuming you have at least the limited capacity to do so. Can you imagine how relentlessly all the other girls in grades K through 4 of my elementary school years relentlessly, endlessly tormented me about my last name, Klinktoast-Houstonhousen?

Bruce: Well, yes, sorry again, Esther! Well, from where did you derive most of the ideas in today's lesson?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Today's lesson draws from the ideas and examples presented by

© Copyright, Bruce Thompson, 2026. 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**.

Larry Cohen in his excellent article, "Trump Suit Contracts—Step 2: What Can I Do About It?", published in the February, 2026 issue of the **ACBL Bridge Bulletin** (p. 55). Esther has altered some of the cards in the Hands.

Bruce: Well, Esther, would you tell us a little bit about this **Larry Cohen** fellow?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will try to help you.

About Larry Cohen

By the age of 22, **Larry Cohen** had won his first two of **25** National Bridge Championships, the Blue Ribbon Pairs and the prestigious Spingold Teams. Between 1979 and 2008, Cohen won **57** first or second place finishes in national and world competitions. In 2002, the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL) named Cohen "Player of the Year". Cohen is also listed on the ACBL's "Top 10 Living Most Influential Bridge Personalities". In 2020, in his first year of eligibility, Cohen was elected to the ACBL Hall of Fame. Cohen has had long-term bridge partnership with players such as Marty Bergen and David Berkowitz.

Cohen's bridge writings have been massively influential. Cohen for many years has published a monthly column in the ACBL Bridge Bulletin. Cohen has authored numerous books including **6** books that have won the American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) "Bridge Book of the Year Award":

Larry Teaches Modern Bidding Vol. I, II, and III (Self-Published 2020);

On The Other Hand (co-written with David Bird) (2019);

On The Other Hand - Defense (co-written with David Bird) (2020);

Tricks of the Trade (2018);

Larry Teaches Opening Leads (2014); and

To Bid or Not to Bid: The LAW of Total Tricks (1992).

Esther regards Cohen's 1992 book on the "**Law of Total Tricks**" as probably being the *most important bridge book of all time!* This book is published in 6 different languages and was the best-selling bridge book of the 1990's.

Bruce: Well, Esther, what do we need to know about playing Suit contracts as Declarer?

Esther: Well, Bruce, your *first* task as Declarer is to identify your "losers". You *must* do so from the perspective of the Hand you control that has the *most* Trump cards assuming your Hand and Dummy do not hold an *equal* number of Trump cards. As Larry Cohen emphasized in his excellent article, "Trump Suit Contracts—Step 1" (p. 47), published in the January, 2026 issue of the ACBL Bridge Bulletin:

"The key to making the ['Line of Play'] plan is to calculate ['losers'] only from one side (the long-trump Hand)".
[emphases added]

Usually, but not always, when playing a Suit contract the Declarer's Hand will hold *more* Trump cards than the Dummy. This means that *usually* you must count the "losers" in your own "closed" (hidden) Hand and not in the Dummy!

Bruce: Well, Esther, what is your *second* task as Declarer after you identify your "losers"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, after you first identify your "losers" your second task is to formulate a "Line of Play" plan that involves identifying ways to "dump" your "losers". There are a variety of ways to "dump" "losers". For example, in my "Esther Bridge Dialogue Lesson #107, As Declarer, 'Dumping' Your Loser(s) Using a 'Loser-on-a-Loser' Strategy", I described one elegant way to "dump" your "losers":

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/loser.pdf>

But in this lesson I will describe **3** other ways to "dump" "losers."

1. Sluff Your "Loser" on a "Winner" from the Dummy

Bruce: Well, Esther, what are the first N/S Hands you would like us to discuss?

Esther: Well, Bruce, how about these **2** N/S Hands?

NORTH (15)

S: K Q T 9

H: K Q J

D: 8 7 5

C: A 4 2

YOU

SOUTH (10)

S: J 8 7 6 3

H: 4 2

D: K Q J

C: K 6 3

N/S are playing a 4**S** contract with SOUTH as the Declarer.

WEST leads the Club Queen thus "promising" the Club Jack and "long" Clubs.

Bruce: Well, Esther, what "losers" should Declarer SOUTH see in his own "closed" Hand?

Esther: Well, Bruce, here once the NORTH Dummy is exposed Declarer SOUTH can see that he will "lose" **3** Tricks to the **3** E/W Aces. Therefore, SOUTH cannot afford to "lose" *any more* Tricks or his contract will "fail". Sadly, the Club 3 in his own "closed" Hand is a "loser".

Bruce: OK, Esther, well, how card SOUTH "dump" his Club 3?

Esther: Well, Bruce, SOUTH sees no opportunity to finesse with these holdings. So, SOUTH must hope that he can discard his Club 3 on a NORTH Dummy Heart "winner". Declarer SOUTH should "win" Trick **#1** with his own Club King.

Now another **Cardinal Bridge Principal** was articulated by Larry Cohen in his January, 2026 article, "General Principle" (p. 53), in the ACBL Bridge Bulletin:

"As Declarer Give Up Your *Inevitable* 'Losers' EARLY!"

So, on Trick **#2** Declarer SOUTH should surrender a Heart Trick to E/W and thus "promote" **2** Heart "winners" in the NORTH Dummy! The defense "ducks" on Trick **#2** but on Trick **#3** SOUTH leads another Heart from the Dummy and the E/W Heart Ace "drops". Thereafter SOUTH leads a "promoted" Heart "winner" in the Dummy and discards his own Club 3. You can later at will "enter" the NORTH Dummy by using the Dummy's Club Ace which you very carefully *preserved* by

"winning" Trick #1 with your own Club King. Thereafter you can "draw" Trump Spades!

2. Trump Your "Loser" from the Dummy That Is "Short" in Trump Cards

Bruce: Wow, Esther, what is a *second* strategy for "dumping" "losers" that you as Declarer hold in your own Hand?

Esther: Well, Bruce, how about these 2 N/S Hands?

NORTH (8)

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

YOU

SOUTH (16)

S: A K Q T 9
H: 6 4
D: T 9 7 3
C: A K

N/S are playing a 4S contract with SOUTH as the Declarer.

WEST leads the Club Queen thus "promising" the Club Jack and "long" Clubs.

Bruce: OK, Esther, SOUTH "sees" only Diamond "losers" in his own "closed" Hand? What can Declarer SOUTH do about his own Diamond "losers".

Esther: Well, Bruce, obviously Declarer SOUTH can ruff his own Diamond "losers" in the NORTH Dummy that has fewer Trump Spades than SOUTH's own Hand but does hold 4 Trump Spades! Always remember that:

Cardinal Bridge Principle

Ruffing the Dummy if the Dummy is "shorter" on Trump cards than your own Hand does not typically generate "extra" of "new" Tricks.

But ruffing your Diamonds in the NORTH Dummy is a *super* idea and on these holdings you have plenty of transportation back to your Hand after Dummy Diamond ruffs!

3. Eliminate Your "Loser" via a Finesse

Bruce: OK, Esther, is there a 3rd way to "dump" "losers" held by the Declarer?

Esther: Well, Bruce, how about these 2 N/S Hands?

NORTH (5)

S: K Q T

H: 8 6 5

D: 5 3 2

C: 8 7 6 3

YOU

SOUTH (16)

S: A J 9 8 7 3

H: A Q J

D: T 9 7

C: A

N/S are playing a 4**S** contract with SOUTH as the Declarer.

WEST leads the Club Queen thus "promising" the Club Jack and "long" Clubs. What "losers" should Declarer SOUTH see in his own "closed" Hand?

Bruce: OK, Esther, is there a 3rd way to "dump" "losers" held by the Declarer?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed! Declarer SOUTH can see that he holds 3 Diamond "losers" and may also "lose" 1 Heart if WEST hold the Heart King and that King is "protected" or "guarded". The NORTH Dummy is too "weak" to provide any opportunities to "dump" SOUTH's Diamond "losers".

Declarer SOUTH's only option is to finesse Hearts from the NORTH Dummy. SOUTH can "enter" the NORTH Dummy using Trump Spades at the same time he is "drawing" Trump. If the 1st Heart finesse "wins" SOUTH will then run a 2nd Heart finesse and will later "win" both his Heart Ace and Queen regardless of how EAST holding the Heart King plays!