

**"As Declarer, 'Placing' Missing Honors by
(1) During Play Counting the Non-Silent
Opponent's HCPs by Subtraction from His
Initially Shown HCP Count, and (2) 'Listening to
Both Opponents' Silence' During the Auction"**

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

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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, 'Placing' Missing Honors by During Play (1) Counting the Non-Silent Opponent's HCPs by Subtraction from His Initially Shown HCP Count, and (2) 'Listening to Both Opponents' Silence' During the Auction"**. 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, is there anything you wish to say initially *before* you begin discussing your latest excellent duplicate bridge lesson?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course I will try to help you! Yes, indeed, I would like to make a preliminary comment. The ideas and the Boards discussed in the present "Esther

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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**.

Bridge Lesson" were drawn from Marc Smith's excellent article, "Play These Hands With Marc", from the March, 2025 ACBL Bridge Bulletin (p. 46). However, I have altered some of the cards in the Boards. Here is the first Board:

Dealer: **WEST**

Vulnerability: **NONE**

	NORTH (13)	
	S: K J 9 6 4	
	H: K T 9 2	
	D: A 5	
	C: Q 4	
WEST (14)		EAST (2)
S: A 8 5		S: 2
H: 7 5 4		H: Q 6 3
D: K Q T 4		D: 9 8 6 2
C: A J 8		C: 9 7 6 5 3
	SOUTH (11)	
	S: Q T 7 3	
	H: A J 8	
	D: J 7 3	
	C: K T 2	

Bidding

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1 NT ¹	2 C ²	PASS	3 S
PASS	4 S	PASS	PASS
PASS			

¹E/W by Partnership agreement are playing 1**NT** as showing (1) a "flat" Hand (2) with **12-14** HCPs.

²N/S by Partnership agreement are playing a 2**C** Overall as showing ~**12** HCPs and **4+** cards in both Majors.

WEST leads his Diamond King thus promising the Diamond Queen and "length" in Diamonds.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther, ...err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what should be Declarer SOUTH's "Line of Play"?

Esther: Bruce, I will try to help you. Once the NORTH Dummy comes down, as usual Declarer SOUTH must count his "losers". SOUTH sees that he will inevitably lose (1) **1** Trick to the E/W Trump Spade Ace, and (2) **2** Tricks to the

E/W Club Ace and either the Diamond King or Queen.
Obviously, this means the N/S can lose no more Tricks if
SOUTH is to "make" his contract.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther, ..err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-
Houstonhousen, what is the critical issue that Declarer
SOUTH must resolve?

Esther: Bruce, I will try to help you. Once the NORTH Dummy
comes down, Declarer SOUTH must see that he must "place"
the location of the "missing" Heart Queen. If the Heart
Queen is held by the SOUTH Declarer's RHO, then a Heart
finesse will work. A successful Heart finesse will "make"
the 4S contract. An unsuccessful Heart finesse, on the
other hand, will doom the 4S contract!

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Declarer SOUTH
wins Trick #1 in the "open" (exposed) NORTH Dummy with the
Diamond Ace. Shouldn't Declarer SOUTH then immediately
proceed to "draw" Trump?

Esther: Bruce, I do not think that this would be a smart "Line
of Play"! Instead, I think that Declarer SOUTH first should
do some "detective work" a la ACBL Grand LifeMaster
Sherlock Holmes!

Bruce: Errr, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, how should this
detective work proceed? Since WEST opened the bidding by
booming out 1NT shouldn't this make Declarer SOUTH assume
that WEST holds the "missing" Heart Queen?

Esther: Bruce, this contract is "on the edge" of "making" or
going down. I think some Shelock-ian investigation may be
in order on this Board before "drawing" Trump. On Trick #2
Declarer SOUTH should lead the NORTH Dummy Trump Spade
King, which WEST will "duck". On Trick #3 Declarer SOUTH
leads a "low" Trump Spade and plays his Trump Spade Queen
from his "closed" (hidden) Hand. EAST sluffs a "low" Club
on Trick #3. WEST takes Trick #3 with his Trump Spade Ace.
At this point N/S have taken 2 Tricks and E/W have taken 1
Trick.

Bruce: Errr, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, I am *supposin'* that
the Trick count is not so important on this Board. I am
supposin' that instead the running HCP count is what
matters on this Board. Is that correct?

Esther: Bruce, on some occasions you say insightful things that take my breath away! You are exactly correct. You as the SOUTH Declarer need to place that missing Heart Queen! Does WEST having shown **12-14** HCPs hold the missing Heart Queen, or does EAST hold the missing Heart Queen?

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, so far WEST has played his Diamond King, "promised" the Diamond Queen, and played his Spade Ace. Thus, WEST has shown $3 + 2 + 4 = 9$ HCPs: his Diamond King for 3 HCPs and his Club Jack for 1 HCP. Thus, WEST at this point still holds $\sim 13 - 9 = \sim 4$ HCPs. And EAST still holds $40 - \text{WEST's } 13 - \text{NORTH's } 13 - \text{SOUTH's } 11 = \sim 3$ HCPs.² Shouldn't Declarer *SOUTH* simply assume that WEST holds the missing Heart Queen?

Esther: Well, Bruce, at this point WEST knows that EAST has "shown out" of any more Trump Spades, the NORTH Dummy holds **3** more Trump Spades, and Declarer SOUTH holds **2** more Trump Spades. WEST can force Declarer SOUTH to spend **2** Trump Spade cards to "win" WEST's last Spade Trump card. And given that WEST's Hand, as promised, is "flat", WEST has few ruffing opportunities! So on Trick **#4** WEST leads his last Trump card!

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what will Declarer SOUTH do next?

Esther: Bruce, on Trick **#5** Declarer SOUTH leads his Club Ten, which WEST wins with his Club Ace. On Trick **#6** WEST leads his Club Jack which Declarer SOUTH wins in the NORTH Dummy. So far the Trick Count is N/S **4** and E/W **2**.

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what will Declarer SOUTH do next?

Esther: Bruce, it is time for the Declarer to play Hearts. But where should Declarer SOUTH "place" the "missing" Heart Queen? So far WEST has played the $\heartsuit K, Q$, the $\clubsuit A, J$ and the $\spadesuit A$ for a total of $5 + 5 + 4 = 14$ HCPs. Therefore, in this case Declarer SOUTH knows *for certain* that EAST holds the "missing" Queen. On Trick **#7** Declarer SOUTH can lead the NORTH Dummy Heart 9 and if EAST "ducks" play "low" with 8 from his "closed" Hand, and otherwise overtake EAST's Heart Queen with his own Heart Ace. If EAST "ducks" on Trick **#7**

² "~" = "approximately".

on Trick #8 Declarer SOUTH will lead the NORTH Dummy Heart Ten. If EAST "ducks" a 2nd time on Trick #9 Declarer SOUTH will "cash" his remaining Heart "winner" in his Hand. The remaining 4 cards left in each Hand are:

	NORTH (13)	
	S: J 9	
	H: K	
	D: 5	
	C:	
WEST (14)		EAST (2)
S:		S:
H:		H:
D: Q T 4		D: 9 8 6
C: 8		C: 9
	SOUTH (11)	
	S: 7	
	H:	
	D: J 7	
	C: K	

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what should Declarer do in cases unlike the present case when it is not mathematically *certain* where a "missing" Honor should be "placed"?

Esther: Bruce, you are "on point!" It will rarely be certain which Opponent holds a "missing" Honor. Nevertheless, you can still very often be *relatively certain* where that "missing" Honor is "placed".

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, can you now give us a 2nd example in a different auction in which both Opponents were silent throughout the bidding?

Esther: Bruce, no problem. Consider the following Board:

Dealer: **WEST**
Vulnerability: **NONE**

	NORTH (10)	
	S: Q T 6 4	
	H: 8 7 2	
	D: A 5 3	
	C: K J 4	
WEST (7)		EAST (10)
S: K		S: 5 2
H: Q J T 6 3		H: A K 5
D: J 9 8 7		D: K T 6 4
C: 9 7 2		C: T 8 6 3
	SOUTH (13)	
	S: A J 9 8 7 3	
	H: 9 4	
	D: Q 2	
	C: A Q 3	

Bidding

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
PASS	PASS	PASS	1S
PASS	2C¹	PASS	4S
PASS	PASS	PASS	

¹N/S are playing the "original" Drury Convention:

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

The **2C** bid by a PASSEd Hand shows (1) **3+** cards in Partner's bid Major and (2) **10-12** HCPs.

WEST leads his Heart Queen thus promising the Heart Jack and "length" in Hearts.

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

Esther: Well, Bruce, EAST overtakes WEST's Heart Queen on Trick #1 and then on Trick #2 "cashes" his 2nd Heart "winner". Declarer SOUTH has lost 2 Tricks and expects to lose a Diamond Trick because the Diamond Queen in his own Hand is only "protected" by 1 Card. Many players would now "cross" to the NORTH Dummy and lead the Dummy Spade Queen for a finesse presuming that EAST holds the Spade King. But is that the smartest play?

Because both Opponents were silent throughout the auction Declarer SOUTH has no information about the E/W holdings, and the finesse only has a 50%/50% probability of success. But so far WEST has played the ♥A,K and thus has

"shown" $4 + 3 = 7$ HCPs. Declarer SOUTH knows that he SOUTH is "missing" the ♠K and the ♦K.

EAST is *unlikely* to hold *both* these "missing" Kings, or else EAST would likely have bid during the auction! Therefore, Declarer SOUTH should lead a low Diamond from the NORTH Dummy toward his Diamond Queen. If EAST "ducks" and EAST does indeed hold the ♦K then Declarer SOUTH's Diamond Queen "wins", and if EAST covers with his ♦K then SOUTH's ♦Q will have been "promoted" into a "winner".

Then given that N/S hold $6 + 4 = 10$ Trump Spades, following the old admonition "8 Ever, 9 Never, 10 *Super Never!*", Declarer SOUTH should play for the Trump Spade King "drop". On this Board the Trump Spade King indeed does "drop". As LifeMaster Walt Disney always said, "*In bridge miracles happen every day!*"