

CHAPTER 16

THE COUNTESS STRIKES

It was the normal hard core of players who had gathered together for the post session drinks. It had been the final session of the final event of the year. Willy Riskett and his partner Bob McDuck looked to have an unassailable lead, unless the Lenny brothers or Slocar and Dives produced a 70+% session and Willy and Bob had a disaster. They obviously hadn't, as Willy wasn't looking too unhappy and Bob had cheerily waved goodbye to all as he wished them a Merry Christmas. He had to fly to Scotland for his annual visit to his family. The same happy scenario was not obvious with the Lenny brothers, and Bruce was already in full flight with his hard luck stories.

"You just wouldn't believe what that Countess Lynley did to us. Remember the hand that West had with KQJ9 of hearts and most NS pairs were in 3NT despite the 5-3 heart fit?"

Without waiting for an answer, he went on regardless.

BOARD 7 DLR S ALL VUL

	♠ A J 6 5	
	♥ A 10 8 5 3	
	♦ 8 3	
	♣ Q 10	
♠ 9 4		♠ K Q 8 7 3 2
♥ K Q J 9		♥ 7
♦ 7 6 4 2		♦ A 5
♣ J 9 8		♣ 6 4 3 2
	♠ 10	
	♥ 6 4 2	
	♦ K Q J 10 9	
	♣ A K 7 5	

"The Countess's partner, Lady Goode-Evans, opened 1D and the Countess responded 1H. Joe made a somewhat dubious jump overcall of 2S. Lady Goode-Evans passed, though she should no doubt have made a takeout double to show SOME extra values, a club suit, AND probably three card heart support. But, as usual, her conservative nature and unfamiliarity with such esoteric new fangled stuff convinced her that to pass was best. Countess Lynley bid 2NT and now, belatedly, Lady Goode-Evans showed her heart support. Lynley SHOULD have now bid 3NT, with such good spades, or passed, but was accustomed to much better dummies from Lady Goode-Evans than her bidding ever suggested, so she boldly bid game, expecting three hearts to at least an honour. I couldn't wait for the bidding to come round quickly enough before wielding the axe."

Without even taking a breath, Bruce Lenny continued: “Joe started with the king of spades. Lynley won the ace and immediately recognised the need to try and establish the diamonds, leading one at trick two. Joe won, just in case a diamond ran away, and returned another, putting Lynley on table. Now, she led a trump from table and I had to go in with the jack, Lynley ducking. I now made the excellent play of a second spade, forcing dummy to ruff, which I thought would guarantee me two more heart tricks. After ruffing in dummy, Lady Lynley started on diamonds and forgot about trumps. This was the position after the third round of diamonds:

BOARD 7 DLR S ALL VUL

	♠ J	
	♥ A 10 8 5	
	♦	
	♣ Q 10	
♠		♠ Q 8 7 3
♥ K Q 9		♥
♦ 7		♦
♣ J 9 8		♣ 6 4 3
	♠	
	♥ 6	
	♦ K Q	
	♣ A K 7 5	

The Countess now led dummy’s king of diamonds and ruffed it, with the EIGHT. Just in case she needed to play the five under the six at any stage, I suppose. Three rounds of clubs followed, Lynley discarding her spade while Joe and I followed suit. Finally came the queen of diamonds. With nothing but trumps left, I had to concede two tricks to dummy: if I ruffed high, she would under ruff, if I ruffed with the nine, Lady Lynley would score her ten and ace. Of course I ruffed high but she didn’t err by overruffing and had me end played! Of course had Joe had the sense to duck ONE round of diamonds and then switch to a club, I’m sure Lynley would not have been able to get the timing right to make the contract.”

Joe broke in: “And if YOU hadn’t poked your nose in with your silly double, screaming out that you had those hearts, I’m sure that, timing or not, Lynley would be down one anyway. I would wager a bottle of Scotch that nearly everyone is in 3NT anyway. Not only that, you DID hear the Countess muttering something about thinking of removing to the SAFER 4NT but she though it wouldn’t buy a double, didn’t you? And we all know YOUR doctrine: 3NT IS COLD. This time, FOUR No Trumps was!”

The Lenny Brothers were about to come to blows when Ben Bacon broke in: “Hmmp! They also played 4H against US. I figured a bird in the hand.... and all that, so did NOT double. The play went the same way but Rags DID duck the first diamond and then continued with a club after winning the second diamond. Declarer ruffed a spade and then led a trump. I went in with the jack and declarer won the ace. I don’t think it would have made any difference had declarer ducked. In any case, declarer won the ace and now THIS was the situation:

BOARD 7 DLR S ALL VUL

	♠ J 6	
	♥ 10 8 5 3	
	♦	
	♣ 10	
♠		♠ Q 8 7 3
♥ K Q 9		♥
♦ 7 6		♦
♣ 9 8		♣ 6 4
	♠	
	♥ 6	
	♦ K Q J	
	♣ A K 7	

Declarer peddled the diamonds and clubs but all this came to an end when she had to ruff in her own hand and lead round to my nine. Maybe if declarer ducks the jack after all....”

At this stage Willy Riskett entered the conversation. He really MUST have had a good session, as he was at his sarcastic best.

(hands repeated for convenience)

BOARD 7 DLR S ALL VUL

♠ A J 6 5	
♥ A 10 8 5 3	
♦ 8 3	
♣ Q 10	
♠ 9 4	♠ K Q 8 7 3 2
♥ K Q J 9	♥ 7
♦ 7 6 4 2	♦ A 5
♣ J 9 8	♣ 6 4 3 2
♠ 10	
♥ 6 4 2	
♦ K Q J 10 9	
♣ A K 7 5	

“I too fell for the double. But, I was unfortunate in that I came across the best dummy player in the club, our visitor from China, Hung Lo. You remember that he’d had the misfortune of being given the new addition to our A Grade, Dolly Barton? Well, he and Dolly had a 5 Card Major auction and when Dolly opened 1H and McDuck jump overcalled 2S, Hung Lo bid 4H which, of course, I doubled. Wouldn’t YOU?”

The Lennys were somewhat perplexed. “But I thought you said Hung Lo played it. DOLLY was North and SHE opened 1H! Don’t tell me you led out of turn? And even if you had, I doubt even Hung Lo could have made it on PERFECT defence,” Joe was sceptical.

“No, nothing untoward at all, at least not that I could protest about. And of COURSE we defended perfectly. Anyone care to take a little wager?”

There was quiet all round. Willy’s reputation must have been growing. He continued, with all present waiting for the expose.

“Dolly was in 4H and Bob led the king of spades. Dolly won and immediately played a diamond, but after some thought, and you must understand that it goes against the McDuck psyche to waste ANYTHING, he finally DID duck the diamond. But THIS is what I, and McDuck, saw in dummy:

♠
♥ 6 4 2
♦ K Q 10 9
♣ A K 7 5

When the queen that Dolly called for held, she had little option but to lead a trump so she could play yet another diamond towards dummy. I went in with my jack and Dolly won the ace. She now led another diamond and this time Bob had to win his ace as the nine was played from dummy. Bob switched to a club and Dolly won the queen when I played my jack. Now Dolly crossed to the king of clubs and discarded a spade on the king of diamonds. The jack had still not appeared. THIS was now the REAL situation but she didn’t know that she had a good diamond in dummy:

BOARD 7 DLR S ALL VUL

	♠ J 6	
	♥ 10 8 5 3	
	♦	
	♣	
♠ 4		♠ Q 8 7 3
♥ K Q 9		♥
♦ 7		♦
♣ 9		♣ 6 4
	♠	
	♥ 6 4	
	♦ (J) 10	
	♣ A 7	

Dolly of course reverted to clubs, calling for the ace. But, just as Hung Lo played it from dummy, he suddenly let out a faint ‘oops’ and uncovered the jack of diamonds, which had lain hidden behind the ten, unnoticed by anyone.

“Oh Dear,” gulped Dolly, as she very quickly called for the jack of diamonds. Discarding the last spade from hand, she now led the four of hearts from dummy. I had to rise with my queen and with only the Q9 of trumps and the nine of spades left, had no choice but to exit with the spade:

BOARD 7 DLR S ALL VUL

	♠	
	♥ 10 8 5	
	♦	
	♣	
♠ 4		♠ Q 8
♥ K 9		♥
♦		♦
♣		♣ 6
	♠	
	♥ 6	
	♦ 10	
	♣ 7	

Dolly trumped with the five of hearts, since she had only trumps left, and immediately turned her card over. Hung Lo, however, as good dummies must do, sat there VERY quietly. While his hand hovered over the six of hearts of course. After some time, he quietly spoke: “What would you like from DUMMY, Dolly?”

Dolly, still flustered and not quite with it, looked at my four of spades, Bob’s eight and then dummy, and gasped: “Oh, well, better TRUMP it, Lo”.

Lo did trump, remarking: “Sorry, can’t trump low. Only one trump in dummy. Must trump HIGH, ho ho. High enough for lead to be in dummy. And which of these would you like NOW?” he chuckled, pointing at the two remaining cards in dummy. Does anyone still NOT believe that the hand is stone cold even on perfect defence, and that Hung Lo is DEFINITELY the BEST dummy player ever seen at the club?”