

Searching for a bridge partner of skillful means

THE BRIDGE CROWD



WOODY BOYD

Be wary of the perfect partner, for if that relationship is so perfectly virtuous that it has no vices, then it is in danger of making vices about its virtues. — Thornton Wilder

Bridge players' fondest want is to uncover a partner of skillful means, commendable grace and exceptional glory. Then winning becomes considerably easier.

Today's adventure, though an original whimsey, is about a righteous lady's search for insight. When she had found it at the edge of expertise, she fled again, much the wiser and ready to do the deeds for which she had first been trained.

Some years ago, Sister Scarcely Straightlaced graduated from someone's seminary school. Recognizing she wasn't yet ready to start in God's workshop, she looked elsewhere for seasoning. Many in her class had chosen to gain sophistication the same way. Some shouldered such work in state capitols and along the Potomac, where there was much need for the heathens who had gathered at those power points. Sister Scarcely, therefore, decided she would acquire some down-to-earth practical experience in some other sort of social source, and bridge was her choice.

Now we all know that the bridge world has undertaken a number of household cleansings in its history, and honor and probity have been preserved in its play. In spite of this, there are still some bad lemons at all levels lurking on both sides of human life, and the damnable Precher Demon was one of them. Sister Scarcely had heard this about him and set her sights on his reform. In short order, she conscripted him to teach her to bid and play, and she in turn intended to redeem him. Neither was easy, but Scarcely was becoming faster adapted than Demon was turning to pure.

Even after a season of effort, it was positively obvious that if Demon didn't learn to stop shouting down others, whether the blunder was theirs or not, he would never be ready to examine his own playing failures and those of his life, too. She, therefore, sounded the final mandate, and needless to say the terms weren't easy, for hell hath no fury like even a virtuous woman player abused by her partner for the last time.

So this was it, the last hand of play in a major club championship that could determine the winner, for our heavenly celebrity and her rapscallion were high on the leader board. Precher had never played better, and his impetuous ego had been contained too. It was the ending Scarcely Straightlaced had envisioned. Success and veneration were her wish, and maybe this was its eve.

Demon's double was in want, but the lead seemed to doom the contract if later a way could be found for him to get in and cash his winners. Scarcely was aware of this defensive nightmare and immediately concluded a courageous play had to be made. It was obvious declarer had 26 or 27 H.C.P. to work with, leaving Demon at best with 8. Careful calculation by her confirmed that her partner had either the spade lady which was finessable or the same in diamonds.

On the presumption that it had to be the diamond, at least doubleton, she jettisoned her ace on her partner's third heart. Precher witnessed this and nearly had a fit, but he mumbled his disgruntlement below anyone's ear. What is that dumb dame pitching an ace for?

Declarer was aware of his fair lady opponent's marvelous technique and passed her a glance of commendation, for he knew this brilliant play could be his undoing. He won the third heart and immediately took the club ace and finessed for the queen. Otherwise he only had eight tricks. Scarcely won and returned the diamond deuce. After an interim of suspicious uncertainty, he played low and the contract failed by three tricks.

Sister Scarcely and Precher Demon had a top and the club championship, too, for those in game brought home the contract, some making as many as 10 tricks.

It was weeks before Precher Demon realized what his partner had done for him and their victory that day. In time he became beholden to her long after she had gone. Daily his vices subsided, and eventually he became the bridge players' preacher of goodwill, and most of his scripture came from his sister, the virtuous Scarcely Straightlaced.

Woody Boyd teaches local bridge classes and is a life master. He lives in Bloomfield Township. To leave a message for Boyd, from a touch-tone phone, call 953-2047, Ext. 1853.

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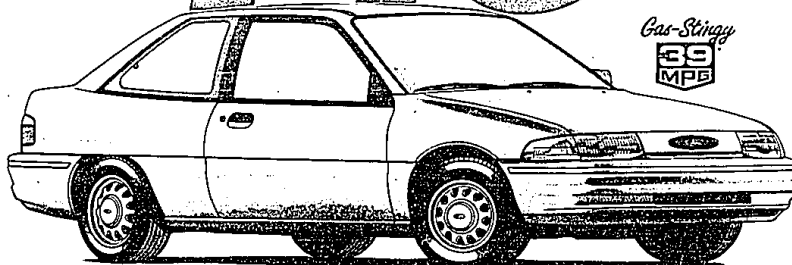
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