

# Lady be Good

By Pietro Campanile

The last set of the semi-final of the National Pairs tournament had finished rather later than expected and that meant BIG TROUBLE.

My fiancée, Samantha, had carefully planned a dinner for 9pm that evening, so that the long awaited ritual of introduction to her parents could be formally carried out in the elegant surroundings of "Chez Philippe" and I was running a little late, well actually over an hour late. The usual conspiracy of traffic lights (have you ever managed to find a green one when you are in a hurry to get somewhere?) and my uncanny knack for finding shortcuts which always end up lengthening my journey meant that I finally got to the restaurant at 10.30. I rushed in and found my sweetie waiting for me alone at our usual table. I tried to stutter a few excuses but I was quickly silenced. In a steely voice she informed me that her parents had left after the long wait and that: "If you prefer your plastic queens over me, so be it but beware! If I have anything to do with it, those queens will haunt each and every bridge game you play from now on!". I did not have time to reflect on that ominous sentence since a few seconds later I was proudly wearing a large bowl of chocolate mousse over my pinstripe suit.

A week and a couple of trips to the laundry later, I was wearing that very same suit to the final of the event (I could not very well wear anything else, could I? Not that I am superstitious, you know, but it would not hurt to play safe and, besides, that suit got me to the final, it would be mighty ungrateful of me to discard it now).

Things got under way and we started against two nice looking ladies, a good propitious sign because, as I always like to say, "Beauty and good bridge do not go hand in hand, if you see one you are not likely to see the other".



I picked up in fourth seat

♠ AKQ9765  
♥ 1054  
♦ A  
♣ Q6

and after three passes, I decided to simply bid what I thought I could make: 4♠. That concluded the auction. West led the ♥Q and this is what I could see:

♠ J8  
♥ K76  
♦ Q543  
♣ KJ98

W N  
S E

♠ AKQ9765  
♥ 1054  
♦ A  
♣ Q6

Not a bad dummy, now all I had to do was trying to figure out what was going on with this ♥Q lead: if it came from QJx or longer, I could be sure of a trick simply by ducking, if it was from Qx I could never make the hand.

I put the ♥6 from dummy and it went small, small. The next card from West froze me to my seat: the ♥A!! In shock I followed low and West quickly continued with a club to her partner's ♣A and got a heart ruff back for the setting trick since this was the complete layout:

|         |           |         |
|---------|-----------|---------|
|         | ♠ J8      |         |
|         | ♥ K76     |         |
|         | ♦ Q543    |         |
|         | ♣ KJ98    |         |
| ♠ 432   | W N       | ♠ 10    |
| ♥ AQ    | E         | ♥ J9832 |
| ♦ 10762 | S         | ♦ KJ98  |
| ♣ 10753 |           | ♣ A42   |
|         | ♠ AKQ9765 |         |
|         | ♥ 1054    |         |
|         | ♦ A       |         |
|         | ♣ Q6      |         |

One down and a disastrous score. Oddly enough, West seemed equally mystified by what happened as she muttered something about wanting to lead a diamond but her hand reaching for the ♥Q almost of its own will.

I discounted her silly explanation for that outrageous lead and made a point of taking the ladies' names in order to report them later: there was obviously some weird signaling system in place there.

A few rounds later we got to play against a husband and wife pair, another likely source of good scores as often enough with such pairs their private issues have a habit of getting in the way of their bridge with disastrous consequences.



After an average plus in the first board when the husband in East declared poorly a 3NT contract, I picked up the following collection:

♠ A108  
♥ AQ107  
♦ AQ6  
♣ 1053

I opened 1NT and after Stayman we quickly found our heart fit and closed the bidding in 4♥.

West shuffled her cards in her hand and then led the ♣Q. Dummy came down:

♠ KQ  
♥ J976  
♦ K1093  
♣ K72

N  
W S E  
S

♠ A108  
♥ AQ107  
♦ AQ6  
♣ 1053

I looked at the ♣Q with deep suspicion, but bridge is bridge and after some thought I played low from dummy. West continued with the ♣A and, despite frowning at the coincidence of having two people trying the same swindle on me in the same tournament, I gave her a defiant look: how on earth could she get across to her partner to receive a ruff?

I should have known better: West smiled back and put a third club on the table, which her partner ruffed! I had to concede one more trick to the offside ♥K for yet another catastrophic one down. This was the complete hand:

|         |       |        |
|---------|-------|--------|
| ♠ KQ    |       |        |
| ♥ J976  |       |        |
| ♦ K1093 |       |        |
| ♣ K72   |       |        |
| ♠ J976  | N     | ♠ 5432 |
| ♥ K5    | W S E | ♥ 643  |
| ♦ 87    |       | ♦ J542 |
| ♣ AQJ98 |       | ♣ 64   |
| ♠ A108  |       |        |
| ♥ AQ107 |       |        |
| ♦ AQ6   |       |        |
| ♣ 1053  |       |        |

This was too much: twice a lead of a queen from the unthinkable holding of AQ by a lady player reaping havoc into my score!

Could it possibly? Surely not! I felt that I must have been getting paranoid to even think about the chance of Samantha's

parting words turning into a curse. "Steady on, lad" I said to myself to calm down my nerves and I moved for the last round.

My next opponents were two delightful little old ladies, nice steady players with whom I played socially in the past, mostly to benefit from their well-honed pastry making skills!



First board: we quickly got to 5♦, after my partner opened 1♥ and raised to 5♦ my 2♦ reply.

West led the ♠Q and dummy came down:

♠ K106  
♥ AQ965  
♦ K875  
♣ 5

N  
W S E  
S

♠ 987  
♥ 7  
♦ AQJ1096  
♣ A98

3NT from the North side might have been a potentially higher scoring contract on a spade lead, but on a club lead 5♦ was probably better.

What about this cursed ♠Q lead? Well, at least this time I had much better spots and covering with the ♠K was the correct play on this layout, only losing to... You guessed it: East took her ♠A and returned a spade to West's ♠J and ruffed the next spade! One off and yet another zero. Did I mention how much I hate Queens?



Second board of the round and last of the event. I tried to pull myself together and became the declarer in 4♥, after this bidding:

| West | North | East     | South |
|------|-------|----------|-------|
|      |       |          | 1♥    |
| Pass | 2♦    | 3♣       | 3♥    |
| Pass | 4♥    | All Pass |       |

I waited nervously for the lead. West calmly put forward a covered card then she turned it up: the ♦Q!

Dummy came down:

♠ KJ8  
♥ J108  
♦ K9753  
♣ K10

N  
W S E  
S

♠ Q109  
♥ AKQ765  
♦ J2  
♣ A9

For a few minutes I stood still, as if transfixed at the sight of that monster. I felt its placid eyes staring right through me as if a novel sphinx, daring me yet again to solve her enigma.

What wicked, underhand ploy was this Queen planning this time? Another lead from AQ? Oh, no! Not again! Determined not to be caught out a third time, I firmly asked for the ♦K from dummy. The continuation was not what I had hoped: East took my ♦K with her ♦A, cashed the ♠A and returned the ♦10 which West ruffed. Following her partner's preference,

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