

A little serenade

By Rikard Greenberg House cat

There are a few firm rules that one should always comply with in a successful relationship and one of them must surely be "Never forget your beloved's birthday".

Well, you guessed it...guilty as charged. Although Prissy certainly did not help me. I mean, there you go: your birthday is due in ten days; what is more natural than planning together how to celebrate it? Why all this cloak and dagger approach, without a single mention of it?

Anyway on the fated day, I went to her place to collect her for our usual stroll but something was not quite right. For a start she took an intense interest in what was in my backpack then, a little disappointed by finding only the drinks I had taken along for us, she kept remarking what a wonderful day it was. Naturally I agreed and I even went on to say that it was indeed a bright sunny day, ideal for a stroll in the park. Prissy looked a little taken aback, then she winked at me and purred saying that I was such a loveable rascal to lead her on like that and had I really organized a surprise party in the park for her?

This is when the penny dropped. I ruffled my whiskers and hmmm hmmmmed to take time but it was no good, the penny had dropped for Prissy too: she gave me her best "wounded kitten" look and went back inside slamming the door with a loud bang.

So here I am with my faithful banjo ready for a romantic serenade which I am sure will square things up between us. It is 10pm, it is dark and freezing cold, but I bravely make my way to Prissy's house. Ouch, that hurt! Who put this rubbish bin in the middle of the street? Come on Rikard, only a few hundred meters left. Wait. Was that a dog crossing the street? Could not be. Too big to be a dog. Gosh, it is a dog!! Oops, helpppppppppppp..... Now that REALLY hurt. Luckily that four legged monster only got the end of my tail before I climbed a nearby tree, but I shudder to

think what might have been.

Now it is waiting for me down there. What to do, what to do? Hold on, isn't this the big oak next to Prissy's house? Of course it is. I can serenade her from here. I got the banjo out of its cover and I started meoowwing the song I especially composed for her:

*All dressed in white with bright blue eyes
wearing a look of awe and surprise,
if you stroke her shiny coat of fur
she will melt in your arms and purr,
at her behest is my demise
her love is like the finest prize,
there is no other quite as pretty
as this beauty that is named Prissy!*

Lights went on, windows opened, my Prissy smiled and sent me a kiss, her food provider doused me with a bucket of cold water, the neighbors dogs kept barking while the four legged monster chased me back all the way to my house: what can I tell you: all in all it was a good night's work!

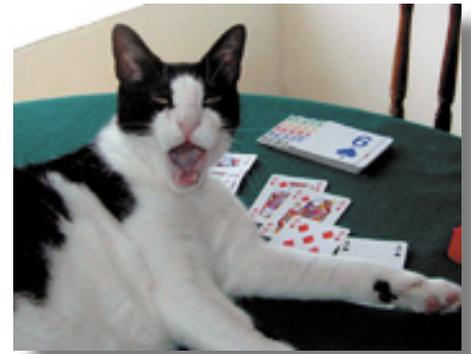
The next day I was invited to play bridge at her house and I had to perform twice my song. I felt like a star and I certainly could not disappoint my fans so I had a really great time at the bridge table too.

Have a look if you can match my declarer play in this hand for instance:

♠ AK4	
♥ K109	
♦ A53	
♣ K765	
N W E S	
♠ 3	
♥ AQJ8765	
♦ QJ	
♣ Q32	

You are declaring 6♥, without opponents' intervening in the auction, on the lead of the ♣10.

Naturally, you play low from dummy, East



follows low and the ♠Q wins.

Assuming that trumps split 2-1, what are your thoughts on the best line of play?

I expect most players will rely on the diamond finesse to bring home the slam, but is there an alternative which offers better chances?

Some of you may well have noticed that if we discard a club from hand on a top spade, there will be increased chances for a twelfth trick by checking first if clubs split 3-3 after drawing trumps in two rounds, discarding a club on the top spade, ruffing the last spade and playing our last club from hand towards dummy.

West follows with the ♣8. What should you do now?

The right answer is to duck because East is now marked with an original club holding of AJx or AJ9x (and remember that he played low when clubs were led first time round). In either case, he will be forced to win and to provide us with our twelfth trick, since anything he plays back will set up either a diamond or a club or a ruff and discard. Our ducking the ♣8 will virtually guarantee the contract, with the exception of the most unlikely event that West had led the ♣10 against a slam from an original club holding of AJ108.

Here is the complete hand:

♠ AK4		♠ J952
♥ K109		♥ 2
♦ A53		♦ K97
♣ K765		♣ AJ94
♠ Q10876	N	
♥ 43	W E	
♦ 108642	S	
♣ 108		
♠ 3		
♥ AQJ8765		
♦ QJ		
♣ Q32		