

Around the world with 52 cards

Travels and adventures of a bridge pro

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Many enlightening comments have been written on the wisdom of getting married to a person from one's own country: similar behavioral values, compatible social backgrounds and not in the least a common language being the obvious pluses. However, since I have never been known for doing what people tell me, I ended up marrying an Italian.

One of the great advantages of such a choice is that you get to have "compulsory" holidays there at least twice a year. Awful prospect, I know. I cannot even begin to describe the terrible ordeal I go through every time I land in Rome and I am forced to spend hours in those delightful narrow streets near the Spanish Steps, checking out the latest in Italian couture. Tired from so much window-shopping, I meekly follow my Lord and Master to Piazza Navona to a charming restaurant just off the main square to have lunch and then after a few more hours spent walking around the magic streets of the "Eternal City," we set off by car to Naples and the family home. Once there I feel like I have moved to a different

world where my every wish is granted and I am pampered like a princess by my wonderful mother-in-law, Mamma Anna.

Apart from the predictable tour of the relatives to catch up on the latest juicy gossip and to be told again and again how "undernourished" I look ("Do you ever get to have a proper meal, dearest?"), the funniest regular event on our schedule is the weekly bridge with Pietro's (yes, that is my other half's name) old-time friends. This is a group of five very likeable guys (as only Italians can be) who meet regularly once or twice a week to play Chicago and have done so for the last 20 years. Together they have baptized their meeting point the "Miou Club," from the name of the resident cat; all the proceeds from each session's losses go towards an end-of-year celebration dinner in a classy restaurant.

For those of you who are versed in bridge anthropology this phenomenon of a basically closed playing environment has generated an interesting by-product: the flowering of several bidding systems like the

“Sorrento club” or the “Capri diamond,” which are solely played here and come in and out of fashion according to the seasons, the moods of the players and/or of their feline mascot.

Anyway, as you can imagine, my entrance into their world caused a big uproar: Until they met me, their opinion on the potential of women in bridge was equivalent to having Goldie Hawn playing quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys. I also had to get used to the remarkable freedom of expression at the table: It seemed that an investigation of each player’s family tree with emphasis on his very close proximity to invertebrate or simian ancestors was a recurrent theme of the evening. Still, the bridge was fun and I was soon happily shouting as loudly as Pietro and his friends.

Here is a hand for you from my first visit to the “Miou Club:”

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

South
 ♠ 7
 ♥ A 8
 ♦ A Q J 10 7 6 3
 ♣ Q 6 3

Opening lead: ♠5

South	West	North	East
Migry	Alfredo	Pietro	Gino
1 ♦	pass	1 ♠	pass
3 ♦	pass	4 ♦	pass
4 ♥	pass	4 ♠	double
pass	pass	5 ♣	double
5 ♦	pass	6 ♦	double
redouble	(all pass)		

How do you play this 6♦ redoubled after this cheerful bidding?

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

♠ 5

South
 ♠ 7
 ♥ A 8
 ♦ A Q J 10 7 6 3
 ♣ Q 6 3

I admit that the redouble might well have been induced by the generous glass of Chianti I had been given, but I also wanted to show these guys that they should not count on getting rich by waving the red card when I am declarer!

Unsure as to which suit to lead after partner doubled both clubs and spades, West settled for a spade. The ♠5 lead went to the ♠Q and the ♠A by East, who returned the ♠J.

It looked to me like the double had to be based on the ♠A and the ♣K behind the club cuebid, so the club finesse was clearly doomed to failure. On the other hand, there didn’t seem to be an awful lot else to do. I was already deeply regretting my rash redouble; this was turning into the kind of story the “guys” would love to tell again and again: “Do you remember when I fixed that so-called lady pro in 6♦ redoubled? That sure sent her scurrying back to Israel with her tail between her legs!”

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

South
 ♠ 7
 ♥ A 8
 ♦ A Q J 10 7 6 3
 ♣ Q 6 3

♠ 8 4
 ♥ K
 ♦ —
 ♣ A

Immaterial



♠ 10 9
 ♥ —
 ♦ —
 ♣ K 10

♠ —
 ♥ 8
 ♦ 3
 ♣ Q 6

I racked my brain in an attempt to find the remotest chance to make this impossible 6♦. "Maybe if East has five spades as well as the ♣K..."

Can you see what I had in mind?

I let the ♠J run to the king, pitching a club from hand. Then I cashed trumps and the ♥A till I got to the following layout:

When I played the ♥8 to the ♥K, I saw Gino's wide grin turn into surprised dismay. If he pitched a spade, I could ruff a spade in hand to set up dummy's ♠8 as the twelfth trick; if he pitched a club, I could cash the ♣A and come back to hand with a spade ruff to enjoy the ♣Q! He settled for a spade pitch and surrendered soon after.

Here is the complete hand:

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

West
 ♠ 6 5 3
 ♥ 10 9 3 2
 ♦ 5 4 2
 ♣ 9 5 4

East
 ♠ A J 10 9 2
 ♥ Q J 7 4
 ♦ 8
 ♣ K 10 2

South
 ♠ 7
 ♥ A 8
 ♦ A Q J 10 7 6 3
 ♣ Q 6 3

Maybe I shouldn't have loudly demanded a calculator to compute the score for 6♦ redoubled, but it was done for a good cause: to show "the guys" that some of us ladies know a thing or two about this game!

The unexpected outcome of my first visit was to be pronounced the arbitrator to adjudicate the many vexing bridge arguments of the club; my email has been bulging ever since with complex hands and bidding problems from my new friends at the Club Miou.