

The Card that never came and the ace that came too soon

High level decisions often end with “if onlys”. One player per side could have been saying those two magic words on the first of the two featured deals from this evening’s play. I just hoped it would not be me.

Would you raise immediately to 4♠ at favourable vulnerability when you heard this quick-fire sequence?

West	North	East	South
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			1♣
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Pass	1♥	3♠	Pass
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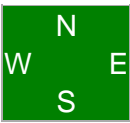
The vulnerability is in your favour (they are, you are not) and you hold:

♠ 542 ♥ KQ62 ♦ K62 ♣ 852

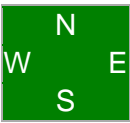
You have no shape, no pips, no pleasant surprises for your partner but too many spades. It seemed silly to incur an unnecessary penalty when no—one was going to disturb 3♠. So, I passed and hoped to be dummy...but not so quickly as North was there with 4♥ and within a flash I had another decision to make. I hate this kind of dive, sticking one’s head out to be chopped off but it seemed with North having most of the remaining hearts, expectation of beating 4♥ was slim..and I still had too many spades.

So, 4♠ it was and the executioner’s axe (North) came down with a’vengeance. Yet, strangely, South emerged with 5♣ and that was that. I was on lead.

I soon regretted leading partner's suit when this came down in dummy:

Board 15		♠ A J 10	
South Deals		♥ A 10 9 8 7 5	
N-S Vul		♦ 10 7 3	
		♣ K	
♠ 5 4 2			
♥ K Q 6 2			
♦ K 6 2			
♣ 8 5 2			
West	North	East	South
<i>You (me!)</i>			
			1 ♣
Pass	1 ♥	3 ♠	Pass
Pass	4 ♥	Pass	Pass
4 ♠	Dbl	Pass	5 ♣
All pass			

What was the card I dreaded seeing from declarer's hand? The ♠A won the first trick but rather strangely South followed with a low spade. A spade ruff and 3 rounds of trumps came next, partner following to two of them. Then, came the suit (hearts) but not the card I feared. Had I made up my mind what to do when that ♥J appeared? I hope so...but it did not appear, merely the lowly 4 and I was able to play low too. Dummy's ♥7 went to my partner's jack and the ♦Q return indicated that declarer could only scramble 10 tricks, despite a cascade of trumps hitting the table as these were the four hands:

Board 15		♠ A J 10	
South Deals		♥ A 10 9 8 7 5	
N-S Vul		♦ 10 7 3	
		♣ K	
♠ 5 4 2			
♥ K Q 6 2			
♦ K 6 2			
♣ 8 5 2			
		♠ K Q 9 8 7 6	
		♥ J	
		♦ Q J 8 4	
		♣ 4 3	
		♠ 3	
		♥ 4 3	
		♦ A 9 5	

	♣ A Q J 10 9 7 6			
West	North	East	South	
<i>You (me!)</i>				
				1 ♣
Pass	1 ♥	3 ♠	Pass	
Pass	4 ♥	Pass	Pass	
4 ♠	Dbf	Pass	5 ♣	
All pass				

I lost tempo by not bidding 4♠ at the first opportunity but so had South by not bidding 4♣. Had South got their hand off their chest, they would have been happier collecting 500 from 4♠x, just about the par score with 4♥ and 4NT making. **Timing means a lot.**

So too when you are defending. Make it easy on your partner if you can. Your problem here is to find a discard. You are South and this is what you can see:

Board 12

West Deals

N-S Vul

♠ 8 7 6 4
 ♥ Q 8 3
 ♦ A 3
 ♣ K 10 9 8



♠ Q J 9
 ♥ 9 6
 ♦ J 9 8 4
 ♣ J 6 4 3

West	North	East	South
<i>Dummy</i>			<i>You</i>
Pass	1 ♥	1 NT	Pass
2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦	Pass
3 NT	All pass		

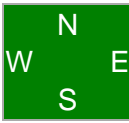
You lead the ♥9 which runs round to declarer's jack with your partner giving you an encouraging little card. Next comes the ♣Q from East, ducked all round to be followed by a second club to the 9

which also scores. Now comes ♣K from dummy to partner's ace with a small spade coming from the East hand.

Your partner now cashes the ♥A and plays a third heart to declarer's king. What is your discard from:

♠ QJ9 ♥ - ♦ J984 ♣ J

For someone who never spoke and who never had very much, suddenly you have an awful lot! Remember your club is high with the 10 still in dummy. Maybe next time a spade might cost but the spade, any spade was certainly the correct card to throw this time.

Board 12			
West Deals	♠ A 3 2		
N-S Vul	♥ A 10 7 5 2		
	♦ 10 6		
	♣ A 7 2		
♠ 8 7 6 4		♠ K 10 5	
♥ Q 8 3		♥ K J 4	
♦ A 3		♦ K Q 7 5 2	
♣ K 10 9 8		♣ Q 5	
	♠ Q J 9		
	♥ 9 6		
	♦ J 9 8 4		
	♣ J 6 4 3		
West	North	East	South
<i>Dummy</i>			<i>You</i>
Pass	1 ♥	1 NT	Pass
2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦	Pass
3 NT	All pass		

The diamond thrown proved fatal but North could have saved their partner in one of 2 ways. North knew that the defence could not run the heart suit no matter whether their partner had started with two or three hearts. South did not have the king. North knew that (best not to lead top of three small in partner's suit so that your partner can work out the likely count.) So, save your partner a discard by leading a low heart not the ace. Which low heart? The ♥10 indicating your entry is in the higher of the 2 non played suits. In fact, even

after cashing the ♥A, the 10 was the exit to save South any awkward decision. Yet, don't cash that ace at all.

Looking after partner. It's an oft forgotten concept. It would have saved a costly defensive slip here.

Richard Solomon