

Bridge with my Favorite Grandmother ¹

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1 My Favorite Grandmother

My Favorite Grandmother is in for her annual visit, and she is still going strong. Before long, as always, we find ourselves facing each other across the bridge table. It's money-bridge of course, and this is the very first hand.

None vul, S dealer.

N (FG)

AK54

7432

Q63

AK

S (I)

Q3

AQ

AJ98

97532

Playing ancient Acol (Granny sees little merit in anything else), I decide to open an off-shape 12-14 point 1nt. FG calmly raises to 7nt, which is passed out. My left-hand opponent (LHO) leads the Qc, and Granny puts down her hand, remarking that with 37 or so points I should hardly have any problem.

In her haste, FG has apparently forgotten to unpack her hearing aide. She must have thought I had bid 2nt. Be that as it may, I must decide how to play 7nt.

Even if the heart finesse is on and four diamonds can somehow be brought in, there are only eleven tricks. A progressive squeeze is clearly necessary. But this means that the same defender must hold five hearts and four spades in addition to guarding clubs. This leaves room for one diamond at best. This had better be the King, as the single Td with W is insufficient for lack of communication. This was the full deal:

None vul, S dealer.

	<i>N (FG)</i>	
	<i>AK54</i>	
	<i>7432</i>	
	<i>Q63</i>	
	<i>AK</i>	
<i>W</i>		<i>E</i>
<i>J982</i>		<i>T76</i>
<i>J9865</i>		<i>KT</i>
<i>K</i>		<i>T7542</i>
<i>QJT</i>		<i>864</i>
	<i>S (I)</i>	
	<i>Q3</i>	
	<i>AQ</i>	
	<i>AJ98</i>	
	<i>97532</i>	

The Qh was finessed, and the Ad dropped the K. Now, three more diamonds, negotiating the marked finesse, squeezed W in three suits in this position:

	<i>N (FG)</i>	
	<i>AK54</i>	
	<i>743</i>	
	<i>—</i>	
	<i>K</i>	
<i>W</i>		<i>E</i>
<i>J982</i>		<i>T76</i>
<i>J9</i>		<i>K</i>
<i>—</i>		<i>T7</i>
<i>JT</i>		<i>86</i>
	<i>S (I)</i>	
	<i>Q3</i>	
	<i>A</i>	
	<i>J</i>	
	<i>9753</i>	

A club or heart discard by W on the Jd would give up two immediate tricks, but a spade discard did little better when the fourth spade subjected W to a criss-cross squeeze.

2 Defending against FG

Despite what she calls “the modest stakes”, Granny’s sound play, aggressive bidding and light opening style have thus far enabled her to easily recoup the lion’s share of her round-trip air-fare. Luckily, I partnered her most of the time. Less fortunately, I now find myself sitting on her right (in the E position), non-vul against vul.

Sitting South, FG deals and passes. W, my partner, bids a weak 2h, which N doubles. I pass, and FG leaps to 4s, which ends the bidding. Partner leads the Kh.

<i>N</i>
<i>T7</i>
<i>A5432</i>
<i>AK5</i>
<i>AK5</i>
<i>E (I)</i>
<i>J8532</i>
<i>76</i>
<i>J43</i>
<i>Q32</i>

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
<i>–</i>	<i>–</i>	<i>–</i>	<i>P</i>
<i>2h</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>4s</i>
<i>End</i>			

FG is a notorious poker player too, but even she finds it difficult to mask her bewilderment when dummy comes down. But then she quickly goes up with the Ah, dropping the 8, ruffs a heart with the 4s in hand, plays 6c to dummy’s A (partner following with the 4), and leads another heart. How do I avert an upgrade to business class at my expense?

As the end of the first century of her life draws nigh, FG is understandably losing some of her famous patience. I feel obliged to play a card before the afternoon is over.

There are five top tricks in dummy, and FG is clearly intent on ruffing hearts in hand. Reasonably enough, she has decided to play me for at least 3-3 in the minors (had she suspected a doubleton, she would have cashed the corresponding high honors at tricks 3 and 4), and there is no way I can stop her from ruffing all four hearts if she so wishes. For example, if I discard a diamond, she can ruff, cash AKd, ruff a heart, Kc, ruff last heart.

So she has 9 tricks. Where will she look for the tenth? If she has Ace fifth in spades, the As will win a trick in the end, and there's nothing I can do, so this assumption cannot be entertained. Does she have five spades without the A? In that case I can beat her by throwing a diamond now (and perhaps another later). But is that likely? She should then have Qd and Jc, and still partner would be quite hefty for his bid, and FG thin for hers. More importantly, she would play the hand quite differently. With KQxxx 8 Qxxx Jxx or with a diamond more, she would no doubt have tried to draw trumps instead, because she initially believes that I have only one heart, and also does not know of the bad trump split. With a diamond less, she would have played Qd, Kd, Ad at tricks 3-5, ruff heart, AKc, ruff heart, claim. So Granny must have only four spades. Missing the A? That would make her jump to game, with just 8 soft and scattered points and KQxxs, far too brave. Furthermore, with the Qd she would always have a legitimate play and would not risk my diamond discard.

So she has four spades and no Qd. She cannot be missing Qs as well in light of the bidding and play, and besides, she would then have no hope regardless.

The full hand:

	<i>N</i>	
	<i>T7</i>	
	<i>A5432</i>	
	<i>AK5</i>	
	<i>AK5</i>	
<i>W</i>		<i>E (I)</i>
<i>96</i>		<i>J8532</i>
<i>KQJT9</i>		<i>76</i>
<i>QT2</i>		<i>J43</i>
<i>T94</i>		<i>Q32</i>
	<i>S (FG)</i>	
	<i>AKQ4</i>	
	<i>8</i>	
	<i>9876</i>	
	<i>J876</i>	

So this is it. FG is playing a straightforward, if unusual, dummy reversal. For her tenth trick she will exit Jc, hoping for Js on her left or a trump endplay.

The latter will work, unless I am careful enough to retain that third diamond as an exit card. So I must discard three trumps on the hearts, or alternatively two trumps and a club (retaining Qc). Perhaps the former makes the defense easier for partner.

3 FG defense

When I was young and Granny was... well, younger, we found ourselves partnering each other frequently. In that sense I was a lucky bridge player. In another not: I was always making bad guesses, especially of opening leads. Of course I have since come a long way, and I now take wrong views instead. But then, unlike now, FG was usually there to bail me out, as in the following deal.

NS were vulnerable, EW not. South, a clever fellow, dealt and opened 1h, playing 5cd majors (for which habit, so goes the urban myth, Granny refused his hand in marriage). Sitting W, I bid 4s, and N closed proceedings at 6h.

NS vul, S dealer.

	<i>N</i>	
	43	
	<i>AT987</i>	
	<i>AQT</i>	
	<i>AQT</i>	
<i>W (I)</i>		<i>E (FG)</i>
		2
		2
		<i>J65432</i>
		65432
	<i>S (CF)</i>	

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
—	—	—	1h
4s	6h	End	

After lengthy (and futile as it were) consideration I led the 7d, which dummy's Ace won, S dropping the 8. How should FG plan the defense?

NS vul, S dealer.

	<i>N</i>	
	43	
	<i>AT987</i>	
	<i>AQT</i>	
	<i>AQT</i>	
<i>W (I)</i>		<i>E (FG)</i>
<i>AQJT9876</i>		2
43		2
7		<i>J65432</i>
87		65432
	<i>S (CF)</i>	
	<i>K5</i>	
	<i>KQJ65</i>	
	<i>K98</i>	
	<i>KJ9</i>	

My reasoning, which FG kindly described later as less than brilliant, was that N must hold three first-round controls, else he'd have Blackwooded. Now, if one of these were a void in spades, the As lead could be disastrous. Furthermore, N would hardly bid as he had with two top spade losers, would he, and if he had a singleton spade I might be handing declarer his twelfth trick, or may be rectifying the count for a minor-suit squeeze against FG, or may be FG had no trumps... Anyway, I led my singleton diamond.

Declarer's thoughts were that things looked grim, and he had no choice but to draw trumps, clear the minors and lead a spade. If FG had the singleton Ace or Q spade at that point, a ruff and sluff would bring in the twelfth trick. But that was very unlikely. Suppose, however, that the small spade was led from *hand*. Sitting W, I would realize that FG must have a singleton spade. Is it a small card, in which case I should follow naturally, or the K, in which case I must hop up with the Ace, lest FG be endplayed? Declarer would already be marked with 13 HCP at this point, so either play could be right.

But FG was thinking too. Mainly, that if she doesn't teach her grandson some basics in a hurry, he will grow up to become the unluckiest expert in the county and place the entire family fortune at risk. But there was this defense to take care of first. Obviously, declarer had no minor suit losers, and surely no trump loser either, because with KJh in addition to a powerful spade suit I would certainly not have led my singleton diamond, looking for another high card in her hand. The only chance to beat this contract was to win two spades, and FG immediately perceived CF's plan. Now, an experienced player in the W seat would guess correctly. But could a young, eager-to-be-clever player resist the Crocodile Coup? Would I realize that CF is devious enough to lead low from Kx? Granny couldn't take the chance. On the second round of trumps

she threw the 2s. CF still went through the motions, but there was no longer any way I could go wrong.

4 FG returns from India

When Granny was young (by her standards) she traveled to India. Ostensibly, she was visiting her nephew, who was stationed at the border-town of Sounali (for refusing to play a non-vulnerable weak notrump with a superior officer, or so it was rumored). But she quickly turned to roaming the country, basking in its eternal wisdom and absorbing its ancient culture.

She came back a changed woman. Having survived for many months on little more than air, water and dust had affected her strangely. She began to frown upon “our cousins across the ocean” for their wastefulness (“Imagine that—game values for a jump raise. Sheer extravagance!”) Her opening bids turned a Polish shade of pale; her preempts were inflicted by acute anemia, as she lowered her standards with an almost religious zeal. Her loved ones began to worry when one night she went as far as shading an Acol two bid (although she later claimed to have mistaken the J for the K).

Curiously, she was doing better than ever, which worried her loved ones even more, since they were frequently her opponents. In one week she bid and made a slam off two cashable aces, brought in a doubled 3nt on a combined 17 point count, and doubled a slam holding Qxx in trumps and out, defeating the contract when declarer assumed she “couldn’t possibly” double with that holding.

This was the deal that finally caused her to be sent away for an extended vacation in Beverly Hills, California, putting an end to her strange crusade.

All vul, S dealer

N
8765
*K*93
*AKQ*97
2

S (FG)
A
*AQ*542
642
*J*653

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
—	—	—	1 <i>h</i>
<i>P</i>	3 <i>d</i> ¹	5 <i>c</i>	6 <i>d</i>
<i>X</i> ²	6 <i>h</i> ³	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i>
<i>X</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>XX</i>

End

1. This was a typical minimum jump shift at the time.
2. Penalty double of course. These were pre-Lightner days.
3. Panic

Opening lead: *Ks*.

It must be understood that Granny's tremendous winning streak was common knowledge by then, and *W*, a sound player, would not have doubled either slam unless he was virtually sure of a set. Yet Granny redoubled without a moment's hesitation.

And then she proceeded to take twelve tricks.

All vul, S dealer

	<i>N</i>	
	8765	
	<i>K93</i>	
	<i>AKQ97</i>	
	2	
<i>W</i>		<i>E</i>
<i>KQJ</i>		<i>T9432</i>
<i>JT876</i>		—
<i>JT853</i>		—
—		<i>AKQT9874</i>
	<i>S (FG)</i>	
	<i>A</i>	
	<i>AQ542</i>	
	642	
	<i>J653</i>	

Opening lead: Ks.

W had to have at least nine red cards (for his double and for his lack of spade overcall—clearly he had no clubs.) The possibility of four diamonds and five hearts could not be entertained, since FG needed five diamond tricks to have any sort of chance. But with five diamonds and four hearts would W make the first double, driving opponents away from the suit in which he had five (not to mention not letting E lead clubs)? This seemed very unlikely. Also, with 4108, and no high cards outside clubs, might not the vulnerable E have settled for a more cautious 4C? So FG correctly assumed 5-5 in the red suits and proceeded accordingly. She won the spade lead in hand and immediately led a diamond, putting in the 7 when W correctly played low. Now, she ruffed a spade in hand, led a second diamond, covered and won in dummy, and ruffed another spade in hand. She then finessed a third time and cashed the remaining diamonds, discarding clubs, to reach the following position.

	<i>N</i>	
	8	
	<i>K93</i>	
	—	
	2	
<i>W</i>		<i>E</i>
—		<i>T9</i>
<i>JT876</i>		—
—		—
—		<i>AKQ</i>
	<i>S (FG)</i>	
	—	
	<i>AQ5</i>	
	—	
	<i>J6</i>	

Granny now ruffed her last spade in hand with the A of trumps, W, perforce, underruffing, and exited with a club. W was forced to ruff again, but was now endplayed in trumps, FG taking the rest.

5 FG loses her cool

It was a Friday night when FG bade a final farewell to septuagenarianism, and she agreed to partner me in the prestigious annual Swiss-teams match at our local club. Our team-mates were a youngish couple in their early sixties, both one-time students of Granny's, whose bidding style, FG noted, had developed a number of unfortunate American afflictions over the years, but whose play and defense were relatively unimpaired. Playing in fairly good form, we reached the final round in second place, nine IMPs behind the leaders. As Granny took her time getting into her seat, my RHO (FG's Left-Hand Offender, as she would later refer to him) blurted out some rude comment about senile LOL's holding up the game. I noted an unmistakable flash in Granny's eyes, but she pretended not to hear, and I followed suit.

Several uneventful boards went by, and then came this.

NS vul, W dealer

				<i>N (I)</i>	
				932	
				<i>AT5</i>	
				<i>T543</i>	
				<i>AJ2</i>	
					<i>E</i>
		<i>W (Offender)</i>			84
		<i>QJT765</i>			2
		<i>Q43</i>			<i>Q62</i>
		<i>J97</i>			<i>QT87654</i>
		3			
				<i>S (FG)</i>	
				<i>AK</i>	
				<i>KJ9876</i>	
				<i>AK8</i>	
				<i>K9</i>	
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>		
<i>2s</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>4s¹</i>	<i>5h</i>		
<i>P</i>	<i>6h</i>	<i>End</i>			

1. Believes opponents can make slam, so 7 doubled undertricks (old scoring) still yield a profitable sacrifice.

Granny considered 6nt, but decided that 6h might offer more options in the play.

W led the 3c (either a singleton or low from three or four to an honor), and Granny launched into an extended trance. When a minute and a half had gone by, Offender lost what scant patience he had harbored, and was about to explode when FG snapped out of it and preempted him with an “Oh dear me, wasting your time for a silly overtrick”.

Offender started to say something about a claim, but FG, with the steady hand of a three-time regional senior-citizen needle-threading champion, rattled off thirteen tricks in rapid succession.

“How on earth did you know?”, exclaimed Offender despite himself.

“Don’t you know”, croaked FG, “eight never, nine ever... or whatever... no wait, five frequently, six sometimes... or is it... ”

Later, when we were waiting for the other table to finish I asked FG: “I suppose that was some sort of avoidance play, wasn’t it?”

—“Not at all. We just got lucky. Very lucky, I suspect, for I see that it is Mildred who is sitting W at the other table.”

This enigmatic prophecy soon came true. E didn’t raise at the other table, but NS still ended up in 6h. Mildred (W) led Qs, and later, when declarer understandably misguessed hearts, she found the killing defense.

The vulnerable slam swing was easily sufficient to clinch the match. But as we were waiting for the final scores, FG could still be heard mumbling, "... how about... finesse on Fridays, bash on birthdays..."

How did FG play and why? How did Mildred defend? Seeing that FG was not in the most pedagogical of moods I decided to work it out myself. Proceeding in orderly fashion, one can see that

1. FG has 11 sure tricks; needs one more.
2. The Ac needs to remain intact for any squeeze to operate.
3. If W has more than one club, he must also have the Qc (or Tc, but the latter will be played by E at trick one).
4. If only W guards diamonds, he can be squeezed in s-d.
5. If only E guards diamonds and has Qc, he can be squeezed in c-d.
6. The diamond menace must be in the S hand for any squeeze. Hence, the 8 is the menace, not the T.
7. A double squeeze (W in s-d, E in c-d) requires keeping AK diamonds intact, since spade and club menaces are both in dummy (A high spade in dummy instead would have worked, but not the high club, since clubs are guarded by E, who discards after dummy.)

FG's play: Low from dummy (else E can later dislodge dummy's Ac, if he wins a trump trick; also, W might have led from Txx), T, K. Now FG reasoned that, given Obs. 3, the only case of interest was if the lead was a singleton, as it probably was anyway (if the lead is indeed from Qxx, there might be some reading towards the end, but this will be easy). So assume that W has 7 black cards. If he has all the trumps then Obs. 5 holds. If he has two or less then Obs. 4 holds. The only problematic case is if he has three trumps. Then a double squeeze may be needed. But if a trump is lost, this may be broken by a diamond return (see Obs. 7). So FG made the following *safety play*. First she cashed Kh (so that she won't lose the trump finesse to the single Q, whereupon a diamond return will break up the double squeeze—true, W must then have QJd for his 6HCP count, but E might still have the 9d: see Obs. 6). Then she finessed in trumps, knowing that if it lost she will still have 12 tricks. When it won and E showed out, she could spread her hand. She drew the last trump, entered her hand in spades and ran spade and trumps, reaching

$$\begin{array}{r}
 N(I) \\
 9 \\
 - \\
 T5 \\
 AJ
 \end{array}$$

<i>W</i>		<i>E</i>
<i>QJ</i>		—
—		—
<i>J97</i>		<i>Q62</i>
—		<i>QT</i>
	<i>S (FG)</i>	
	—	
	8	
	<i>AK8</i>	
	9	

On the last trump W sluffed Js, dummy a diamond, and E was squeezed, forced to discard a diamond. Now FG led a club, ready to finesse if W could follow (Obs. 3). But W was squeezed instead, throwing a diamond, and FG's hand was (known to be) high.

In the other room, W led Qs. Declarer entered dummy with a heart and led a second round, ducking to W when E sluffed the 4c. Now W found the brilliant return of the diamond J to break up the double squeeze, while retaining the Qd in partner's hand (else declarer, knowing he cannot squeeze E in the minors anyway, since W needs Jd or Qc for 6 HCPs, might squeeze W in s-d) and the 9d as guard in her own (Obs. 6).

6 FG on facts and issues

“Bridge would be a much simpler game if the issues were not so often obscured by the facts”, FG philosophized. Somehow, I couldn’t shake the feeling that this had something to do with my going down in a vulnerable slam earlier that afternoon.

NS vul, E dealer

				<i>N (FG)</i>			
				A5432			
				63			
				KJ4			
				A52			
				<i>W</i>			<i>E</i>
				KQJT9			76
				75			942
				T82			Q953
				QJ9			T874
				<i>S (I)</i>			
				8			
				AKQJT8			
				A76			
				K63			
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>				
—	—	<i>P</i>	<i>1h</i>				
<i>1s</i>	<i>2nt</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>4c</i>				
<i>P</i>	<i>4s</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>6h</i>				
<i>End</i>							

W led the Ks, won in dummy. There were two minor-suit losers. If W had the Qd, then the diamond finesse would bring in the contract. If E had it, I might be able to execute a double squeeze—no, a club switch (when I lost a trick to improve the count) would break it up. But if E also had five or more clubs, then I could squeeze him in the minors, throwing him in at the end for a lead up to dummy’s diamond tenace. Even if *both* defenders had the Qd I might still be able to set up spades, if W happened to have overcalled with only four. A black-suit squeeze against W was out of the question, since with 5-5 he surely would have applied their specialized two-suited overcall.

To maximize my chances—or so I thought—I ruffed a spade in hand, drew trumps, entered dummy in clubs and ruffed another spade, disclosing the 5-2 distribution. Now I ran trumps, but W kept his clubs and a spade, and there was nothing I could do. Bad luck, I thought.

“The location of the Qd, you see, was not the issue. Unfortunately, this was obscured by the fact that dummy happened to have the Jd. Consider how you would play the hand if dummy’s Jd were exchanged with W’s deuce:

	<i>N (FG)</i>	
	A5432	
	63	
	K42	
	A52	
<i>W</i>		<i>E</i>
KQJT9		76
75		942
JT8		Q953
QJ9		T874
	<i>S (I)</i>	
	8	
	AKQJT8	
	A76	
	K63	

“Now things are much clearer. There are eleven top tricks, and you need one more. Not letting yourself be misled by the irrelevant fact that you do not happen to have any spade losers, you duck the opening lead to improve the count (‘later’ will be too late against sharp defense). W does his best by switching to the Qc, but you win in dummy and ruff a spade in hand (as a precaution against W having only four). Then you run all your trumps, arriving at

	<i>N (FG)</i>	
	A5	
	—	
	K4	
	5	
<i>W</i>		<i>E</i>
QJ		—
—		—
JT8		Q95
J9		T8
	<i>S (I)</i>	
	—	
	—	
	A76	
	K6	

with W still having to discard *twice*. If he unguards clubs, you cash the Kc, forcing him to unguard diamonds as well, and then a diamond to the K and the

As squeezes E in the minors. If W unguards diamonds first, you play Ad and a diamond to the K, forcing W to unguard clubs too, and again the As squeezes E in the minors. Reading the end position should give you no trouble at all, due to the fact that E needs all his cards to guard the minors, and that you would have to misguess the distribution by *two* cards (playing W for an “impossible” five-card minor) to go wrong”.

7 FG on finessing

“The secret to successful finessing”, declared FG wisely, “lies in avoiding the losing ones”. I was not quite sure I understood, so she drew the following diagram of a deal from her afternoon game.

NS vul, W dealer

N
T43
AQ543
AJT
62

S (FG)
AKQ98765
T
Q4
K7

“We were vulnerable, EW not. Our opponents were a pair of nice young American gentlemen, who played some sort of silly modern system they called ‘Precision’. Sweet. W dealt and opened 1h (5+, 11-15 HCP), which was passed around to me. I bid 4s of course, and W passed”.

“Now”, continued Granny, “partner raises to 7s, passed out. W leads the 2s, E following with the J. Plan the play”.

—“Obviously this never happened. N would be crazy to bid this way, and W would lead the Ac he is marked with. Anyhow, I have ten top tricks, and there appears to be little choice in the play”.

“Quite right on all counts”, agreed FG, “I was just trying to make a point. N was daring, not daft. She bid only 6s, which was passed out. Same lead, E following. Plan the play”.

—“Hmm... this is less obvious. I’ll have to think about it”.

—“Please do. But I have to admit that this was not quite what happened at the table. Partner, who seemed to harbor little appreciation for the implied solidity of my vulnerable jump to game, meekly passed. Now E, evidently uncomfortable with the idea of losing a seven-minute rubber, reopened with 4nt (pick a minor). I passed, W bid 5c, and partner 5s, which was passed out. Same lead again, E following. Please play”.

In 7s the diamond finesse needs to be working, and also the heart finesse or stiff king offside. Finesse diamonds, run everything. Dummy's last two cards are AQh, FG's Th, Kc. Now play a heart to the A (unless of course W has obliged you by throwing the Ac).

In 6S a successful diamond finesse brings in the contract. However, there is just enough room in E's hand for a K, and it is far more likely to be the diamond K than the heart K. But the hand can always be made when the heart K is onside (provided one reads the distribution), by means of a squeeze without the count. Simply cash Ad and run the trumps to reach the following position.

	<i>N</i>	
	—	
	<i>AQ5</i>	
	—	
	62	
<i>W</i>		<i>E</i>
—		
<i>KJX</i>		
—		
<i>AX</i>		
	<i>S (FG)</i>	
	5	
	<i>T</i>	
	<i>Q</i>	
	<i>K7</i>	

On the last trump W must bare his Ac. You throw the 5h from dummy and lead the 7c. W wins and exits with a heart, but you finesse, cash Ah, and the Kc is your twelfth trick. Of course, W might have both red kings. When in doubt, it is probably best to assume (at the time of decision) that W has unguarded hearts, unless, of course, he discarded only two. This never loses unless W has six or seven hearts and is missing the Kd.

In 5S, however, you have a perfect safety play. This was the full hand.

NS vul, W dealer

	<i>N</i>	
	<i>T43</i>	
	<i>AQ543</i>	
	<i>AJT</i>	
	<i>62</i>	
<i>W</i>		<i>E</i>
<i>2</i>		<i>J</i>
<i>J9876</i>		<i>K2</i>
<i>K52</i>		<i>98763</i>
<i>AQJ4</i>		<i>T9853</i>
	<i>S (FG)</i>	
	<i>AKQ98765</i>	
	<i>T</i>	
	<i>Q4</i>	
	<i>K7</i>	

“At trick 2”, said FG, “You play a heart to the Ace and ruff a heart in hand. When E’s Kh falls, you claim thirteen tricks on the marked diamond finesse. But note that if the K does not fall, you play a diamond to dummy’s Ad and a small heart, discarding the Qd. W wins, but any return presents you with your eleventh trick, using the Ts as an entry if necessary.

So you see, in seven you must avoid an unnecessary losing finesse to a singleton Kh. In six you must recognize that you have a choice, and avoid the finesse that is far more likely to lose. And in five you make sure of avoiding the losing finesse by not taking any”.

—“Yes, very nice. Interesting hand, too. You would be down in the excellent 6s by taking the wrong right finesse, when the wrong finesse happens to be right. Yet you made two overtricks in 5s by planning to take no finesse at all, but...”

“Well... I would have”, interrupted Granny, looking a touch embarrassed, “but I must confess that this was not exactly how it happened. You see, I wasn’t actually the declarer in this hand. When W chose 5c over E’s 4nt, my partner decided to take the sure plus by doubling. This was passed out. Now, with her powerful red-suit holding and the expected 11 spades in our combined hands, you’d think partner would lead trumps (down three), wouldn’t you? But no—she led a spade. I won and, realizing that there was neither a way for W to get rid of any diamond losers nor any cause for a switch to trumps, played back my singleton heart. Partner won the Ace and returned a heart, which I ruffed. Next, we took three rounds of diamonds, and a heart overruff meant five down. I, well, judged that particular moment to be somewhat inappropriate for lecturing partner on her judgment”.

8 FG on deception

“The best defense against deception”, lectured FG, “is not to be fooled”.

My face must have disclosed my incomplete comprehension of just how, precisely, one should go about implementing this strategy, for she added: “Failing that, one should attempt to fall back on the second-best strategy, which is of course...” Just then the phone rang, and Granny had to play the leading role in a trans-Atlantic you-be-the-judge affair. By the time it was over our guests had arrived and it was time to sit down and play.

Curiously, FG found the opportunity to display both strategies in the very first rubber. EW were a pair of bright young local experts, playing a complicated multi-gadget system, which FG diagnosed to be marginally more tiresome than futile. Both sides were vulnerable with nothing on, and E dealt and opened 2c, showing any three-suited hand (4441 or 5431) with 12-16 HCP.

FG, sitting South, overcalled 2nt, which, according to our general approach to such situations, showed about a Queen and a half more than a 1nt overcall, or roughly 18-20 HCP. This was passed out, and W led the 2s (playing third/fifth best).

All vul, E dealer

N (I)

T73

Q54

Q853

T73

S (FG)

Q64

AK2

AKT2

Q64

West North East South

— — 2c 2nt

End

FG played low from dummy, and E went up with the Ace and shot back the 5s.

Granny cleared the first hurdle by putting in the Qs, which held. (Later she explained that E seemed a dash too eager. She did concede, however, that E could never have dared put her to the test had EW been playing fourth-best leads, since W might then have had Jxxx, leaving her with Qx). Now FG cashed Ad, W playing the 4 and E the 9. How should she continue?

This was the full hand.

All vul, E dealer

	<i>N (I)</i>	
	<i>T73</i>	
	<i>Q54</i>	
	<i>Q853</i>	
	<i>T73</i>	
<i>W</i>		<i>E</i>
<i>J82</i>		<i>AK95</i>
<i>T63</i>		<i>J987</i>
<i>4</i>		<i>J976</i>
<i>AJ9852</i>		<i>K</i>
	<i>S (FG)</i>	
	<i>Q64</i>	
	<i>AK2</i>	
	<i>AKT2</i>	
	<i>Q64</i>	

Granny paused momentarily, and then played AKh. When both followed she laid down the Kd...

“You should have played by the principle of restricted choice”, I later told her. “E was an expert, and therefore the play of the 9 was mandatory from J9xx in this position, in order to give you a chance to go wrong. Now, since the a priori probability of a smaller-than-9 singleton is three times as great as that of a singleton 9, the percentage play is clearly to plan to finesse against E”.

Granny, who likes to feign total ignorance in such matters, replied wearily: “I’m afraid that I am totally ignorant in such matters. I do, however, strictly adhere to the principle of making one’s contract. If E’s 9 were truly single, my play would have brought in eight tricks on the proven diamond finesse, whereas if I had misguessed I might have amounted to no more than seven, even if I had not cashed the high hearts yet (say if E had AKxx Jxxx 9 Axxx). But when W showed out, you will recall, I simply cashed my third heart to reach this position:

	<i>N (I)</i>	
	<i>T</i>	
	—	
	<i>Q8</i>	
	<i>T73</i>	
<i>W</i>		<i>E</i>
<i>J</i>		<i>K9</i>
—		<i>J</i>
—		<i>J7</i>
<i>AJ985</i>		<i>K</i>
	<i>S (FG)</i>	
	<i>6</i>	
	—	
	<i>T2</i>	
	<i>Q64</i>	

Now I could exit with a small black card of my choice, and defenders were helpless, so long as I took care to unblock the Td, which I did”.

—“Yes, I see. E was marked with at least one high club honor. And you tested hearts first, so that if E showed up with a singleton, you would know to play him for four diamonds. Perfectly safe!”

“That, indeed, is the second-best defense against deception”, concluded Granny. “Allow yourself to be fooled only when you can afford it”.

—“Well, you’ve got to give E credit for his clever defense. Also W, for diagnosing the misfit and neither bidding nor leading clubs”.

—“Definitely a most promising pair. If only they weren’t so bogged down by their awkward bidding habits”, said Granny. Then she added dreamily: “Singleton nine is about 5 to 1 on. You forget that there are only five diamonds out but seven clubs, of which E is marked with at least one top honor, and that E is known to have a singleton in one of the minors...”

9 Return of FG

[Story of FG's mysterious disappearance in the sixties deleted]

On a cool spring morning in 1970 Granny reappeared on our doorstep, as suddenly as she had vanished. We barely recognized her in her tie-dyed T-shirt and love-beads and psychedelic headband. She was tired and hungry and cold, but there was a sparkle in her eye, a guitar on her back, a water-pipe in her satchel and a dream in her heart (which somehow never materialized): to captain Crosby Stills Nash and Young in the summer national knockouts.

“I have come to look for America”, she announced, “what’s for breakfast”?

“I never did find it”, she would confide in me years later, “not the America I was looking for, anyway. What I found were five-card majors and forcing notrumps and ever stronger 2/1’s. I found stale remnants of exhilaration over the success of Wei’s Precision team in the Bermuda Bowl. I found conventions and treatments; I found two-suited bids and three-suited bids and no-suited bids. The forest, you see, had been obscured, nay, smothered, by the trees—ostensibly young sprouts, but in reality rotting cadavers in all but the most deft of hands”.

She quickly collected three of her old and faithful students into a team of four, and took to the countryside in a Quixotic assault on the “encroaching decadence”, as she put it. They lived off the land and, mainly, off teams of self-proclaimed scientists who had dared meet their challenge, not realizing that they had two strikes against them from the start: FG was not on their team, and FG was on the opposing team.

The strongest team they opposed was a group of scientists headed by a retired child prodigy, then already in his late twenties, who had gained fortune at the bridge-table but fame for reciting the first 1800 digits of π in random order to the music of Led Zeppelin. It was a ruthlessly fought out affair. The scientists took an early lead, and were still in front by a small margin at the half. But as the battle raged on, FG’s team waxed strong, the following hand marking the turning point.

None vul, S dealer

N
J6
K32
T54
AKT73

S (FG)
AQ873
AQ8
976
62

With no one vulnerable FG dealt and opened 1s. W bid 2d and N 3c, which was passed by E, leaving FG with a choice of evils. 3nt might talk W out of a diamond lead, but was far too dangerous, especially as the lead would probably have to be lost at least once. 3s would grossly overstate the spade suit, and 3d was tantamount to heresy. So she bid 3h. This was where half her strength was located, it allowed partner to bid 3nt or give delayed support in spades, and if partner raised hearts, the Moysen fit might well prove playable. W passed, and now N had a problem. Partner might be 5-4 in the majors, but also 5-5, or may be even 4-4 (with 15+ HCP). Game might well be on ice, since partner could be quite strong, but it was hardly assured. Finally, after much deliberation, N opted for 4h in favor of the false preference. E doubled, and this ended the auction. W led the 5 of trumps, 2, J, Q.

The full hand:

None vul, S dealer

			<i>N</i>	
			<i>J6</i>	
			<i>K32</i>	
			<i>T54</i>	
			<i>AKT73</i>	
	<i>W</i>			<i>E</i>
	54			<i>KT92</i>
	54			<i>JT976</i>
	<i>AQJ832</i>			<i>K</i>
	<i>QJ8</i>			954
			<i>S (FG)</i>	
			<i>AQ873</i>	
			<i>AQ8</i>	
			976	
			62	
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>	
—	—	—	1s	
2d	3c	P	3h	
P	4h	X	End	

It was clear to W that E must have good spades, else he would not have doubled the heart contract. Also, N was marked with shorter spades than hearts. A trump lead certainly seemed to be indicated.

It was equally obvious to FG that the only chance would be to make the trumps separately. Even then, five side-suit tricks would be needed. This meant Ks had to be onside, and also QJxc. Also, E was very likely to hold Kd on the (non-diamond) lead, leaving W with an aggressive, but not unreasonable nonvulnerable overcall.

The problem now was to get the timing right. FG played low from dummy, taking E's Jh with the Q. Then she played a club, finessing the T when W played low (best). Now a spade to the Q was followed by two more clubs, throwing a diamond, and a spade to the Ace, reaching the following position.

<i>N</i>		
—		
<i>K3</i>		
<i>T54</i>		
<i>73</i>		
<i>W</i>		<i>E</i>
—		<i>KT</i>
<i>4</i>		<i>T976</i>
<i>AQJ832</i>		<i>K</i>
—		—
 <i>S (FG)</i>		
<i>873</i>		
<i>A8</i>		
<i>97</i>		
—		

FG led a spade, and W found himself squeezed in the 4h. If he kept it, dummy would ruff with the 3, a club would be overruffed in the S hand cheaply (presumably with the Ah, after E ruffed high), another spade ruffed with the Kh, and a club lead would score the 8h by the coup *en passant*. So W ruffed the spade, thereby relinquishing his guard against dummy's clubs, but FG overruffed with the Kh and led a club, squeezing E in the Ks. If he kept it, ruffing high, FG would overruff, ruff a spade in dummy while E followed helplessly, and again elope with the 8h. So E sluffed the Ks instead. But FG threw a diamond and led the last club from dummy. E ruffed high, but FG cleverly sluffed again, and made two more tricks with the A8h, making 4h doubled on what might be called a double one-card squeeze with elopement overtones.

Events took a different turn in the other room, where the retired prodigy was South. The first round of bidding was the same, but RP bid 3d over partner's 3c, asking N to bid notrumps if he could stop diamonds. N couldn't, and therefore very reasonably signed off in 3s.

The opening lead posed no great problem for W. S could not possibly have the Kd, since he would not then have taken the chance of N declaring 3NT with, perhaps, Qxxd. A trump lead couldn't be right, but dummy's clubs might provide discards. So W led Ad, continuing diamonds when partner's Kd dropped, as E sluffed the 4 and then the 5 of clubs. Then, in the following position, W paused for thought.

	<i>N</i>	
	<i>J6</i>	
	<i>K32</i>	
	—	
	<i>AKT73</i>	
<i>W</i>		<i>E</i>
54		<i>KT92</i>
54		<i>JT976</i>
832		—
<i>QJ8</i>		9
	<i>S (RP)</i>	
	<i>AQ873</i>	
	<i>AQ8</i>	
	—	
	62	

The defense needed two more tricks. E would have signaled a doubleton club, so he had to have at least one left. Could he have a heart trick? That would leave no room for a spade honor in view of South's opening bid. So two trump tricks were the only chance, and in that case a ruff and sluff could not help declarer but might hurt him. And so it did. RP, who on any continuation but another diamond might have guessed to take two trump finesses, was left with an impossible task. If he ruffed in dummy, as E sluffed his last club, he could take one trump finesse, but would still have to lose two trump tricks. And if he ruffed in hand, E again sluffing a club, he would lack the entries for two trump finesses. Nor was there a trump coup or endplay.

With this swing FG's team shot into the lead and never looked back. Ironically, this success proved to be their downfall, as no other team dared oppose them. Soon they had no choice but to disband and go their own ways.

Still, their fate was not nearly as tragic as that of the retired prodigy. Traumatized by the loss, he took to alcohol, then drugs, and finally, when no hope was left in sight, he bottomed out and became a chess player.