Breaking News:

Magician's Amazing Trick Makes Sure Trump Loser Vanish!

--Bruce Schwaidelson (bruschwade@aol.com)

Come One, Come All! Observe our magical declarer as he attempts to make a certain trump loser disappear. Playing in a 6♠ contract, he has a likely side-suit loser, so he must draw trumps without losing a second trick while facing this trump layout:

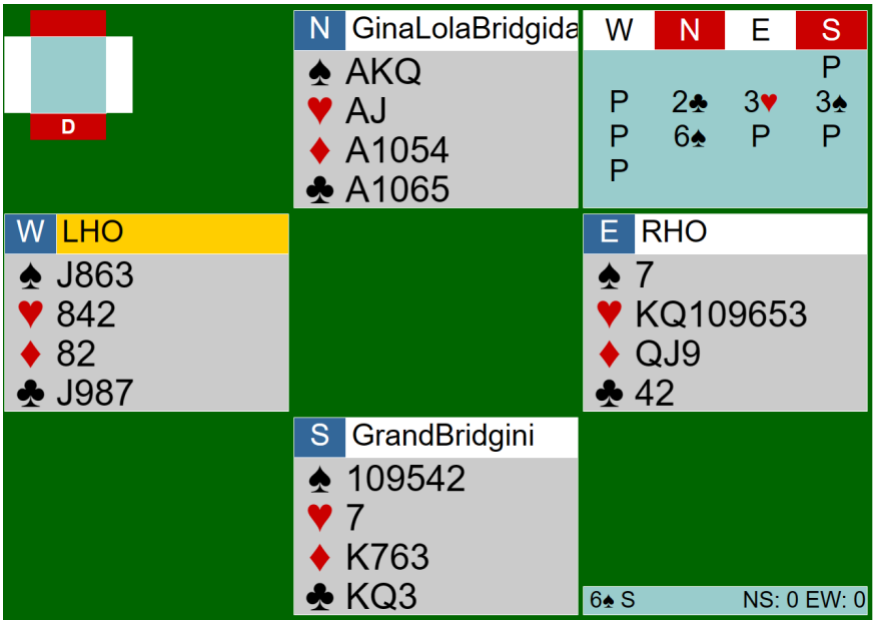
Dummy: ♠AKQ

LHO: ♠J863 **RHO: ♠7**

Decl: ♠109542

Looks easy enough until he cashes dummy's Ace and King and RHO shows out. He is doomed, or so it appears, unless he can miraculously find a way to pick up the ♠J8.

Impossible, you say? Perhaps not even The Amazing Kreskin or the great Harry Houdini could get out of this jam, but fortunately Harry's bridge-loving cousin Barry Houdini, who has dubbed himself *The Grand Bridgini*, is available today. Please stand back as he plays out today's deal and see if you can pick up his sleight of hand maneuvers. He will of course be aided and abetted by his long-time assistant, paramour, and bridge partner, Gina Lola Bridgida.



After two passes, Gina Lola (North) opened 2♣, planning to rebid 2NT, but East rudely got in the way by making a preemptive 3♥ call with her 7-bagger. Once The Grand Bridgini joined the fray by showing his rather anemic 5-card spade suit, his able assistant had no problem bidding slam holding all six key cards (trump Queen included), 22 HCP and beautiful trump support. She elected not to try for the grand, despite her partner's self-proclaimed title, since he was, after all, a passed hand.

West trusted his partner and led the ♥2 (low from 3 or 4) and The Grand Bridgini looked over dummy and counted his tricks. If all went well, he could foresee winning five spades, one heart, three diamonds and at least three club tricks, with a diamond his only probable loser. But all did not go well as he soon discovered.

After winning the heart lead with dummy's Ace and watching East signal to her partner with the ♥K, Bridgini called for the trump Ace and King. He was dismayed, but not totally surprised, when East pitched a heart on the second round.

Looking at the full deal, do you see any possible way to make this contract? Our marvelous magician would need to pull a rabbit out of his hat, so to speak, but let's presume that's not legal at the bridge table. *But wait… don't forget we are in the presence of The Grand Bridgini!*

Prior to proceeding, our perceptive prestidigitator pondered this perplexing predicament and prepared a pair of plausible plans:

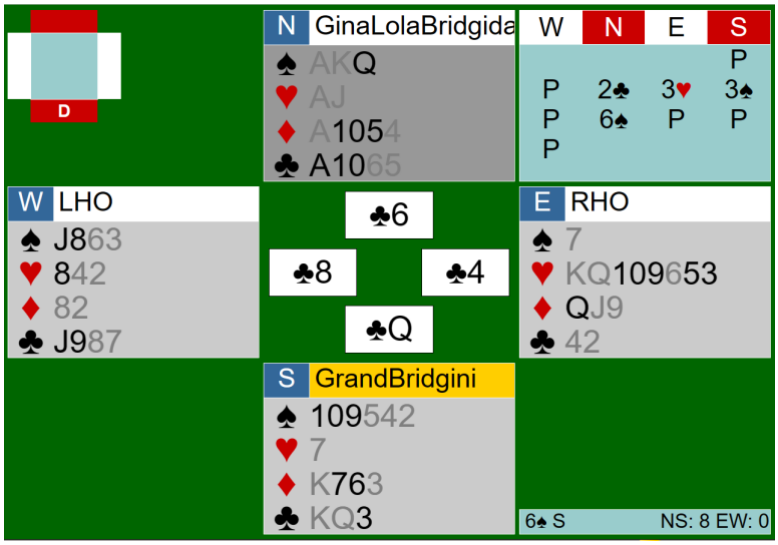
Plan A - No Diamond Loser: There was one surefire way to avoid a diamond loser - find an opponent with a doubleton ♦QJ - but when declarer led a diamond to his king, unfortunately RHO played the 9 and LHO the 8. Plan A had gone "poof."

Plan B - The Magic Trick *(No Trump Loser!)*: Undaunted, Bridgini continued with a low diamond to dummy's Ace and smiled as he watched his LHO complete his high-low echo (8 then 2) to advise his partner - and declarer - he held an even number of diamond cards. Believe it or not, Bridgini knew that *if* (1) East held the missing ♦Q, as West's carding seemed to indicate, and (2) West held exactly four clubs, the contract was a laydown. In fact, if East's preempt was a 7-carder, she was marked to be 1=7=3=2, leaving West with 4=3=2=4 distribution.

Before continuing, The Grand Bridgini called out to everyone who might be in the area: *"Would anyone like to observe as I make West's sure trump trick disappear in thin air?"*

As this was the final board and everyone else had played it, a crowd of kibitzers began to gather around his table. They had seen The Grand Bridgini work his magic before and they came running - myself included.

Bridgini ruffed dummy's remaining heart before leaning over the table towards his partner. That was the signal she should mop his brow with her handkerchief for full effect, as this was all part of their act. When Gina Lola obliged, the onlookers were captivated. The ♣K-Q were next. This time the defenders did not give count but Bridgini knew he could succeed only if West held four clubs. Here was the position after trick 8, declarer on lead:



Before playing his last club, Bridgini addressed his admirers: "Please get your magic words ready. I don't care if you use 'abracadabra' or 'presto chango'… even 'please & thank you' will work." His audience was prepared!

Next came the finesse of the ♣10 followed by the Ace, RHO pitching two hearts while Bridgini discarded a diamond. It was now time for those magic words and the spectators obliged, including a man with a heavy accent who called out something like "heez mudder, heez mudder." Bridgini thought he might be saying "his mother," so he suggested: "Please leave my mother out of this and choose some other magic word." *Watch closely what happened next!!!*

The Grand Bridgini called for the ♦5, RHO winning the Queen while LHO pitched his last heart. Down to nothing but hearts, East was obliged to lead one and Bridgini faced his two remaining cards, the 9 and 10 of spades, so that they were in full view for all. Indeed West's trump trick was about to vanish in thin air! If West played the Jack, dummy would overruff and if he played the 8, dummy would pitch a diamond. The 6♠ contact had miraculously succeeded! Notice that when dummy led a diamond to endplay East, it would not have helped for West to ruff (rather than discard a heart) and then return his ♥8 or ♠J.

If you would like to observe the illusionist's sleight of hand more closely, you can click here and then continue to hit the *NEXT* button for a ringside seat. You can even watch in slow-motion.

After the crowd erupted, The Grand Bridgini, unlike most magicians, wanted to enlighten his fans with great detail regarding his amazing trickery. Besides, he knew darn well what the guy with the accent was trying to say. It was not "heez mudder" or "his mother," it was in fact "*he smother.*"

The Grand Bridgini's Reveal: As that man had deduced, this is a fairly rare version of what is called a trump "smother play." The idea is to endplay the defender who is void in trumps and has no choice but to lead a suit in which *the other three players are void*. To make the smother work, following the throw-in, the declarer and LHO must be down to all trumps and dummy must have one fewer trump card plus one side-suit card to shed if LHO underruffs.

Much to the delight of magicians everywhere, the *Encyclopedia of Bridge* advises that this unusual bridge play is also called "the disappearing trump trick." *Voilà!*

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