

For a fistful of MPs



Rikard Greenberg, House Cat

I cannot complain: ever since the start of my involvement with the delightful Prissy and our successful entry into competitive bridge, life has been very good to me.

My Prissy was so proud of our achievement in qualifying for the regional phase of the National Pairs that she could not stop fussing over me and introducing me to all her girlfriends during our daily outings. I was her champion, her mentor, her...everything!

I cannot say that I minded. I really liked walking around with such a gorgeous creature under my arm: the glances of admiration mixed with envy we got during our strolls made me feel six feet tall.

It was, therefore, with a little trepidation that I looked to the fast approaching date of the regional finals, after all I was very happy with the status quo and I knew that poor performance in the event would likely break the spell that held her close to me. In the weeks before the tournament I tried to prepare myself and I dug up every single book about the game that Anne had ever bought: I read bridge, I ate bridge and hopefully I digested bridge up to the last sleepless night before the tournament which I spent poring over B. H. Garfield's "Tiger Bridge for enterprising felines".

Then it was time to go.

Hana gave us a lift to the club hosting the event and during the journey I tried to make sure that Prissy had looked up the system. Her answer froze me to the spot: "System? Sorry RikRik, I did not have time. Yesterday they screened the final program of "Who wants to be a millionaire". Could not miss it, RikRik. Besides, who needs a system when they are playing with such a great player as yourself?".

It all sounded very ominous, but there was nothing for it but to cross my fingers and hope for the best.

After a very bumpy ride at the start, we held our own and I declared a few nice hands towards the end, thus raising our average to what I estimated conservatively was a score of 52-55%, good enough to get through if we did not get blitzed in the last round.

Unfortunately I saw that the South of the table we were moving towards shadowed his partner with his tall frame. It was with a sinking feeling that I recognized Felix and his sponsor waiting for us to move. Mindful of his peeking skills which had hurt us so much in the heats, I warned Prissy to keep her cards close to her chest (sigh), told her how wonderful she had been playing and off we were.

In the first board Felix hogged the bidding and made 10 tricks in 3NT, while the rest of the field was in the normal 4♠ just making. He wrote down the score then, turning to me with his wicked grin, he remarked loudly how quickly beginner's luck can run out and, smiling to Prissy, that people who REALLY wanted to improve their bridge should play with REAL experts.

I wanted to kill him on the spot! But the advice from "Tiger Bridge" came back to me "A real tiger does not get mad, she gets even!".

In the second board I picked up:

♠ A105
♥ AQ10975
♦ 85
♣ 107

Prissy opened 1♣, I replied with 1♥ and, over her 1NT rebid, I continued with 3♥ showing an invitational hand with 6 Hearts. Prissy raised me to 4♥ and this is what I saw after Felix's partner led the ♦Q:

♠ K96
♥ 84
♦ A104
♣ AK632

W N
E S

♠ A105
♥ AQ10975
♦ 85
♣ 107

I ducked the first diamond, took the second with the ♦A, successfully finessed the ♥Q, cashed the ♥A dropping the ♥J offside, went to dummy with a club, ruffed the last diamond, cashed the second top club and ruffed a club, Felix following. Clubs did not split: it looked like Felix had started with three hearts and four clubs. I saw a chance for a nice play if he had also started with three diamonds. I offered him my most angelic smile and I tabled the ♥10. I could see he did not look at all happy about that: his only choices were to open up the spades for me or exit with his fourth club, which I could now ruff allowing me to pitch my losing spade on dummy's fifth club. He tried to fool me with a sneaky ♠Q but I guessed the position and made 11 tricks for a clear top. This was the complete hand:

♠ K96
♥ 84
♦ A104
♣ AK632

♠ J432
♥ J2
♦ QJ932
♣ J4

W N
E S

♠ Q87
♥ K63
♦ K76
♣ Q985

♠ A105
♥ AQ10975
♦ 85
♣ 107

While a dejected Felix was writing down the result, I could not help remark, rather loudly I admit, how quickly beginner's luck really does run out and that an expert player will always come through eventually. My last words were almost drowned by Prissy's joyful "purrrrrrrr".

On the way out from the club, with our 54% final score on the board, Felix took me aside and growled menacingly: "We'll meet again, buster. Don't you have any doubts about that!". I did not take much notice of him: I was already looking forward to having Prissy all to myself for at least another 2-3 months!

