

# A Killer Deal

by Ely Clubertson

A historic tragedy which took place in Kansas City, KS in 1931. The victim was John S. Bennett, a prosperous perfume salesman, who met his death as the result of a game of contract in which he played with his wife against another married couple (the Hoffman's). His wife became so infuriated at her husband's play that she shot him following a bitter quarrel. She was tried for murder later the same year, and acquitted. The alleged hand was as follows:

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

Mr. Bennett opened the bidding without sufficient values for an opening bid, and suffered an unusually heavy penalty. However, four spades was not an impossible contract, and Ely Culbertson analyzed the deal as follows:

We have heard of lives depending upon the play of a card. It is not often that we find that figure of speech literally true. Here is a case in point.

Mr. Bennett had overbid his hand. Of that there can be no doubt, but even with this, so kind were the gods of distribution that he might have saved his life had he played his cards a little better.

Mr. Hoffman opened the diamond ace, then shifted to the club suit when he saw the dummy void of diamonds, and led the club knave. This Mr. Bennett won with his king and started to pull the adverse trumps. Here again he flirted with death, as people so frequently do when they fail to have a plan either in the game of bridge or the game of life. He still could make his contract and save his life.

The proper play before drawing the trumps would have been to establish the club suit, after ruffing the last diamond in the closed hand, upon which to discard losers in his own hand.

Suppose Mr. Bennett, when he took the club trick with his king, had led his last diamond and trumped it with one of dummy's small trumps. He could then lead the club ten, and, when Mr. Hoffman followed suit, his troubles would be over.

He would play the ace of clubs and lead the nine or eight. If Mrs. Hoffman put up the queen, Mr. Bennett should trump and let Mr. Hoffman overtrump if he pleased. If Mr. Hoffman, after winning this trick, led a heart, the contract and a life would be saved. If he led a diamond the same would be true.

A lead of the trump might have still permitted the fatal denouement but at least Mr. Bennett would have the satisfaction of knowing that he had played the cards dealt to him by fate to the very best of his ability.

*From The Official Encyclopedia of Bridge, Frey-Truscott, editors; New York, Crown Publishers, Inc., (c) 1971, pp. 28-29*