

MORTON'S FORK COUP

by Maritha Pottenger

This bridge play is named after Cardinal Morton, Chancellor under King Henry VII. He regularly got plenty of money for the king's treasury from London merchants. Cardinal Morton's approach was that if the merchants lived a lavish lifestyle, they obviously had plenty of money to pay taxes. On the other hand, if they lived very frugally, he noted that they must have saved lots of money, so could again pay lots of taxes. This was known as being impaled on Morton's Fork.

In bridge, the defenders have a choice of two losing options. They can win a trick cheaply or they can duck to preserve an honor combination (such as ducking from AJ10 when a low card is led toward King or Queen). The problem for the defenders is that they lose a trick no matter whether they win cheaply or they duck!

It is all in the **timing**!!

As West, you are on lead against 6H and you lead the King of Spades. Your hand is:

KQxxx
x
AJx
K10xx

This dummy appears:

Axxx
A10xx
Qxx
xx

Declarer trumps your spade lead and plays the King of hearts. Your partner shows out on the heart lead. Declarer now leads a low diamond. Do you rise Ace or not?

It matters not which you choose. You are impaled on Morton's Fork! If you take the Ace of diamonds and switch to a club, Declarer will take the Ace of clubs, play King of diamonds, and enter dummy with the trump Ace to discard two losing clubs on the Queen of diamonds and Ace of spades.

If, on the other hand, you duck the diamond trick, Declarer will take the Queen of diamonds in dummy and promptly discard the King of diamonds on the Ace of spades. Then, Declarer will play Ace of clubs and a club, giving up one club, and ruffing a third club in dummy.

Declarer's Hand
VOID
KQJxxxxx
Kx

Axx

(In this case, West opened a spade, so Declarer knew who had the Ace of diamonds. In other cases, you would have to guess well to execute Morton's Fork—leading low to the correct honor.)