

Entertainments At Which We All Assist No. 2.

One-Way Bridge

Written Under Contract

by

ANNE HOPE

NEW ZEALAND'S evil winter may be good for coal merchants, but it is uncomfortable for the rest of us. In my case, for instance, it is pulling me down socially.

You will realise what I mean when I admit I cannot play contract. . . In the long, dull winter evenings such a secret is not to be decently concealed, so I made up my mind a fortnight ago that the sin must be remedied. Agatha Jones promised to teach me.

"Just a quiet four," she told me over the telephone. "I'll get Lucy and Joan to come over, they do so love a game—oh no, not at all good. Just average. Besides, you'll pick it up in no time, having learnt auction."

"Yes," I agreed dubiously, and knew I was snared.

While we were late starting because Lucy had forgotten her Culbertson, and it took half an hour to restore her confidence. Agatha settled the argument by pointing out that we wouldn't play for money, anyway, and it was better to start Anne off with the simplest rules.

"Quite," I said. "I'm hopeless. I've never played contract in my life."

"Nonsense," Joan replied briskly. "It's all in the bidding. Once you learn your conventions, it's as easy as A.B.C."

They all looked so eager and happy I was foolishly persuaded.

"I'll deal," said Agatha, "and you can be my partner, Anne. Are you warm enough? Or would you like to sit next the fire?"

I smiled gallantly, although there was a sharp draught running across the floor and up under my singlet. "Perfectly warm. Just right."

"Perhaps you would like one of the comfortable chairs?" insisted Agatha. "Let me sit in that hard one."

"No, no," I protested. "I like a hard chair. It keeps me alert."

"All right. But tell me if you want the window closed. There may be a draught on your back."

I PICKED up my cards and they looked dull. There were only three faces.

"Now the first thing to remember," explained Agatha, "is that you mustn't call unless you've got two-and-a-half honours tricks or three and even three-and-a-half if you're vulnerable. Count the honours now—an ace counts —."

"No, no," interrupted Joan, leaning across the table and clawing at my cards so that they bent backwards on to the cloth and I had to give them up.

"You learn the Losing Count, Anne. It's much easier. You call one on seven and you can put up one on nine.



Joan turned to me like one of those female spiders that devour their mates, "If you play the Losing Count and the Forcing Two, you know exactly where you are," she said.

Supposing you had had a count of six and you'd got five spades to the ace-king, then you'd call One Spade and if your partner had —."

"I don't agree," burst in Agatha. "She'll have to learn Culbertson, Joan. I wish you wouldn't be so stubborn. Everyone's playing Culbertson still and it's sheer waste of time doing another system, not half as good either."

Lucy was nodding wisely. "You call one if you've got two-and-a-half to three and two if you've got four-and-a-half to five," she said, following Culbertson parrot-fashion.

"One Club is better," argued Agatha. "If you've got three-and-a-half to four, you call One Club. Then your partner says One Diamond if she's got nothing, and if she has a good hand she can go —."

BY now they were walking all over my cards with their hands, and tapping the cloth with long finger-nails. I noticed that Joan's face was getting red—sure sign of temper.

"Nonsense," she said loudly. "It's a stupid convention. Agatha. Now, Anne," turning to me.

ing to me like one of those female spiders that devour their mates, "If you play the Losing Count and the Forcing Two you know exactly where you are. If you call Two Spades, your partner knows you've got four or less and she adds four to her own total and subtracts it from eighteen and there she is! She knows how many you can get and may see a slam. Of course, if she's got nothing she gives the regulation Two No-Trump response."

"How dangerous!" protested Agatha. "You may have to play it in Three Spades with nothing on the table at all. If you play the One Club, now —."

Joan said cattily. "I've never known a single good player that follows that convention. You must see, Agatha, it's utterly artificial. But with the Losing Count —."

"Look here," I said desperately, "oughtn't I lead something?"

"Yes, yes," agreed Agatha. "Yes, we had better get on. I hate post-mortems, anyway"—with a dirty look at Joan.

She added, brightly: "You've got the idea now, Anne, so we might as well pick up and let you play a hand on your own. Are you sure you wouldn't like that window down?"

Just a little," I suggested timidly. "But I'm really quite comfortable, and if no else is feeling it —."

(Continued on page 41.)

CALLING all Culbertsons! Anne Hope this week explains the conventions unconventionally.