

BEST CHANCE OR ONLY CHANCE

One common problem is when you have options, one of which is known to work. On the hand below, for example West opened 1♥ and soon found herself in 4♥ after North had overcalled in spades. Out came the ♠AK, South following with the 10 and 3, then a third spade followed.

♠ Q J 6 4	♠ 9 5	Barring a 5-0 trump break (or a less likely HJ7xx with North), then 11 tricks are possible, provided you trump correctly at trick 3. If North has the ♥J, then trump with the 10, then draw trumps easily making 11 unless North has 4 or more.
♥ A Q 9 5	♥ K 10 8 5	
♦ A Q J 3	♦ K 7	
♣ 5	♣ A J 6 3	

If South holds it, ruff high, play a small heart to the Ace (North may have singleton Jack), then back to the DK and run the ♥10. The latter line is better, as South is more likely than 50-50 to hold the ♥J given that spades are 5-2. Sometimes, though, such a choice is an illusion. Put yourself in the West seat and plan the defence, as all the sensible columns say.

	♠ A Q	South opens a 12-14 1NT at pairs, North thinks, then raises to 4 (quantitative) and South passes rather hurriedly. You lead the ♦10, on which partner plays small and declarer takes the Ace on table. At least you can place the cards easily, as partner has a jack or two only.
	♥ K 10 5	
	♦ A Q 7	
	♣ K 10 8 7 2	
	N	
♠ K 7 3		A club to the Ace and the ♣J back suggest it isn't your day, then a third club to declarer's 9 sees partner discard the ♠2, a DODS discard encouraging spades. The way things are going, it looks like 6NT will be easy but you have to minimise the overtrick damage against 4N.
♥ Q J 3	W	
♦ 10 9 8 6 4		
♣ Q 5		

You can spare a diamond so do so, then declarer stares at the ♠2 and takes the spade finesse, obviously assuming partner wouldn't tell him about the King if he had it. Hasn't he heard of double bluffs?

Declarer now cashes the spade Ace, partner following small; this play feels horribly like a Vienna coup suggesting South has the spade Jack and is unblocking a winner. He plays the rest of the clubs shedding a heart from hand on the last one as partner sheds a medium heart and the ♦J. You dump diamonds, but now a diamond to the Ace gets a small heart from Partner and now a diamond is meanly led towards the King. "Help!" is your first reaction, especially as you have to discard before partner, but it shouldn't be. You know that declarer has the ♥K for his bid so dumping a heart gives declarer 3 heart tricks; if he has the ♠J then you are squeezed regardless, although then he'd have a 13 count and might have tried 6N rather than passing. Also, partner had to have some reason for that spade discard, so just let the ♠K go. At the table, West panicked, dumped a heart and declarer who had the ♠10 but not the Jack, made all 13 tricks. He'd started with ♠10xx ♥Axx ♦Kxx ♣AJ9x so his pass of 4NT was understandable and correct. That's still no reason to let him make the extra overtrick.

There really wasn't a decision here, given the ♥10 on table. With the ♥9 instead, though, life is much harder – what if declarer had ♥A10x to start with, when you must let the ♠K go? There again, what if partner had started with ♥10xxx and declarer had the ♠J after all, passing 4N with a fair 13 count. Now partner must keep the hearts and you the spade King. As the cards lay, West had it easy although at the table he clutched the ♠K, sadly like a non-swimmer grabbing an anvil as a lifebelt.