



Ken Eichenbaum

**BRIDGE
WITHOUT A
PARTNER**

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Bridge Without

A

Partner

A novel by Ken Eichenbaum

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE – Introducing Zelda	3
CHAPTER TWO – Our First Session.....	5
CHAPTER THREE – Zelda For The Defense	14
Second Time High	15
How Should I Know	16
Too Tired	18
Trick or Treat.....	20
Zelda Cashes Out.....	24
FULL ANALYSIS OF 1NT – OFFENSE AND DEFENSE.....	26
Zelda Meets Kung-Fu	28
Killing Entries.....	30
CHAPTER FOUR – First Hometown Sectional.....	32
What Happened to the Hearts?.....	32
My Kingdom for a Three	37
The Last Hand.....	39
CHAPTER FIVE – The Big Club Is Born.....	42
Our Babies Grow	46
The Trial	49
The Zelda Rule.....	51
Zeldan Mathematics	55
Zelda Invents Another Bid.....	57
CHAPTER SIX – EPSON.....	59
The Hands	60
Round One	60
Round Two	64
CHAPTER SEVEN – The System.....	78
Opening Bids	78
Responses	79
Overcalls.....	80

Doubles	80
Extremely Strong Hands.....	80
SPECIAL	80
Bidding Quiz	81
ANSWERS	83
RATING	89
CHAPTER EIGHT – The Law	90
CHAPTER NINE – Our Best Tournament.....	97
Saturday	98
EPILOGUE	128

CHAPTER ONE – Introducing Zelda

My name is Friday. I'm a bridge pro. I work here.

It was a warm spring morning, and Zelda and I were on our way to a sectional tournament in Cincinnati. I had played professionally for quite a few years, and had had my share of clients who could not follow suit, but on this day, and in the days to come, I was in for a special treat. I had heard about Zelda's prowess at the table, as she was referred to me by a friend, another professional, much more famous than myself. But in my wildest imagination I could never have dreamed what nightmarish talents Zelda actually possessed. I used to place partners into three categories; the good, the bad and the ugly. This, however, was a person so basically unaware, she would forever remain "UNCLASSIFIED." This was a person so devoid of thought, the black holes in space bowed with envy. For me the journey had just begun. I was about to enter a new space and time, one outside the realm of normal reality. I was about to enter the *Zelda Zone*.

As I was saying, we were on our way to Cincinnati, about a two hour drive, so we would have plenty of time to discuss what we were going to play. I had already mulled over in my mind what our approach would be; weak two bids, sound openers (at least by her), quantified raises, and lots of no trumps bid by me. Of course I was not sure of exactly how much Zelda knew, so I decided to give her a little quiz.

"Okay, Zelda, if you open one club, and I bid one no trump, how many points do I have?"

"Six to ten," she replied with confidence.

"Very good," I said, highly impressed and feeling somewhat encouraged. "So, if I have six to ten points, what are the most points I could have?" I knew I was leading her, but I was trying to get to my next point. My next point, however, was going to have to wait. Her confidence waning, and awed by the magnitude of the current problem, beads of sweat began to form on Zelda's brow. Zelda was aware that her mathematical aptitude was being put to the test, and she did not like being flung into uncharted waters. What could be the key that unlocked the mystery to this complex algebraic formula? Moments passed when suddenly she replied in a quivering, questioning voice,

"Ten?"

"Right!" I said.

"Whew," she sighed in relief, "I thought that was a trick question."

"Now," I said continuing, "what are the minimum total points needed to make a game?"

"I don't know," she responded.

“Well, that's a tough one,” I said, “but let's say for the sake of argument that we need at least twenty five points to make a game. If you bid one club, and I bid one no trump, and the most points I could have are ten, how many must you have to bid a game?”

“Thirteen?” she guessed.

“No,” I said.

“Four?” she tried. (I was later to find out that FOUR was a number she always guessed when she had no idea what the answer was.)

“NO,” I found myself almost shouting, my previous encouragement beginning to falter.

“Look,” she said, “I'm not very good at math. Just tell me.”

“Fifteen,” I said. “If I respond 1NT to any bid you open you must hold at least fifteen points to bid a game. Do you understand that?”

“Yes,” she responded.

“So,” I continued, “if you open one club and I bid one no trump, and you have a balanced hand” (perhaps I assumed too much when I used the word balanced), “with twelve high-card points, what do you bid?”

“Three no trump?” she proffered.

It suddenly dawned on me why I had inherited this lovely lady from her previous mentor. At a certain point anguish and frustration trump remuneration. However, being one who is always up to a challenge, I felt committed to the task of helping her achieve her goal of attaining life master status. I decided to play a set with her, see what her tendencies were, re-evaluate and go from there. As further discussion would be unproductive, we drove on in silence.