

Just before Christmas *by Derrick Browne*

After the opponents open with a 1-bid, an overcall of 2NT is "Unusual", showing at least five cards in each minor. Sue Robinson used this bid on the South cards below in a club game. If the auction proceeds as shown, what should South bid next?

Dealer West, both vul.

NORTH
S AJ872
H 863
D 32
C 865

WEST
S Q643
H KJT97
D Q5
C T4

EAST
S KT9
H AQ542
D KJ8
C 32

SOUTH
S 5
H —
D AT9764
C AKQJ97

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Pass	Pass	1H	2NT
3H	4C	Pass	?

While the Unusual 2NT suggests weakness, it can also be strong, a hand planning to bid again. Now, with North supporting clubs, South hopes there will be no more than one loser in diamonds and could reasonably bid 4H to show control, and if North bids 4S to show the ace, South could try 6C. At the table, East bid 4H rather than pass, so Sue contented herself with 5C and got a good result when this was doubled and her partner Rae Stamp comfortably made it.

The power of shape features in the following poem, based on one which appeared in a 1950s bridge column:

Just before Christmas

'Twas just before Christmas
Two guests in our house
Had started to play bridge
With me and my spouse

"Please tell me," she shouted,
"Why didn't you double?
It was plain from the start
That we had them in trouble."

"'Tis futile, my dear,"
Said I, taking a stand,
"to discuss it with you -
Let's play the next hand."

"Remember next time,"
Said she, icing a frown,
"To double a contract
That's sure to go down."

So I picked up my cards
In a downtrodden state
Then I opened One Spade
And awaited my fate.

	S 9876	
	H 65432	
	D 8765	
	C —	
S —		S AKQJT
H QJT9		H AK87
D AKQJT		D —
C AQJT		C K987
	S 5432	
	H —	
	D 9432	
	C 65432	

The guy sitting South
 Was like many I've known
 He played and he bid
 In a world all his own

"Two clubs," he countered
 With scarcely a care
 The nine in his hand
 Gave him courage to spare

My wife, smiling faintly
 And tossing her head
 Leaned over the table;
 "I double," she said

And North for some reason
 I cannot understand
 Bid Two Hearts with only
 Five small in her hand

I grinned and doubled
 Enjoying the fun
 And turned to South
 To see where he'd run

And South, undistressed
 Not at loss for a word
 Came forth with Two Spades
 Did I hear what I heard?

The other two passed
 And in sheer disbelief
 I said "Double, my friend
 That'll bring you to grief"

South passed with a nod
 His composure serene;
 My wife with a flourish
 Led out the heart queen

I sat there and chuckled
 Over their fix
 But South very calmly
 Ran off eight straight tricks

He ruffed the first heart
 In his hand right away
 And then trumped a club
 On the very next play

He crossruffed the hand
 At a breathtaking pace
 Till I was left holding
 Five spades to the ace

In anguish my wife cried
"Your mind's growing old!
Don't you see that for us
Seven notrumps is ice cold?"

By doubling this time
I'd committed a sin
It just goes to prove
That you never can win.

With compliments of the season.