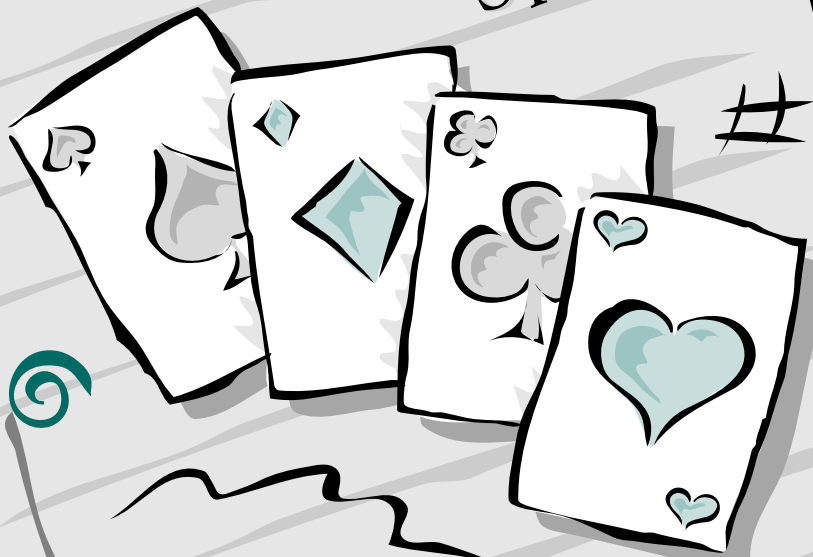


TALES OUT OF SCHOOL

by:

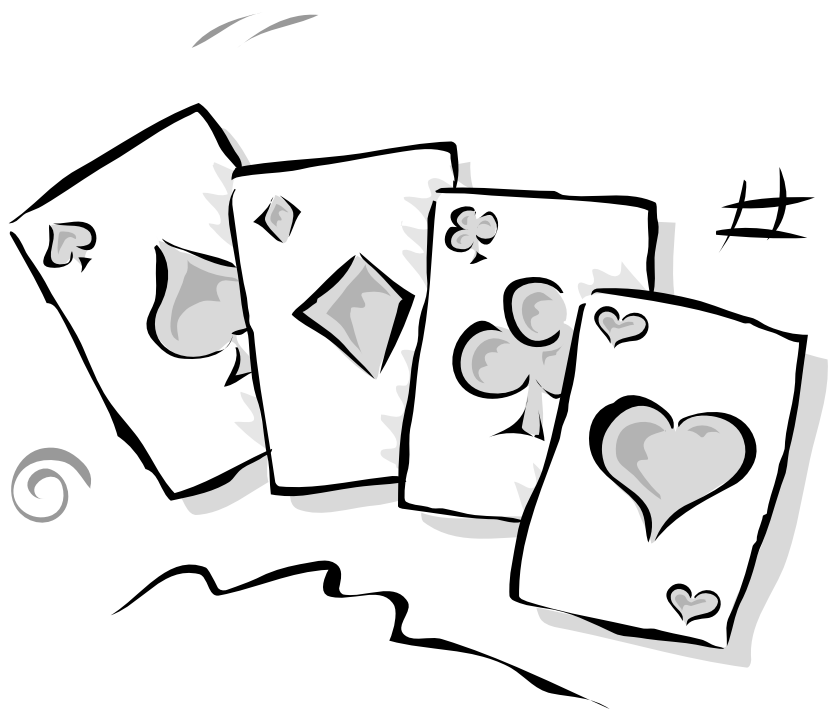
David
Silver



foreword by:

Dorothy Hayden
Truscott

TALES OUT OF SCHOOL



DAVID SILVER

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For Barbara, my life-long partner

FOREWORD

by **Dorothy Hayden Truscott**

(*World Champion and WBF Grand Master*)

There are two kinds of people in this world: those who play bridge and those who do not. There is a big difference between the senses of humour of the two groups. Bridge players can be old or young, married or single, handsome or homely, frail or hearty — it does not matter. But bridge players must have a highly developed sense of humour: they need it to survive the slings and arrows flying about the table, not to mention the bolts of lightning from above.

Tales out of School is a hilarious collection of stories featuring the author's *alter ego*, Professor Silver, who teaches at Mohican College. The students who take his Bridge 101 course achieve some remarkable successes despite his unorthodox theories and instructional methods. But his status as a bridge “expert” leads him into continuing misadventures involving the administration and other faculty members, and it seems to be only a matter of time before one of his colleagues or ex-partners takes drastic action. Finally one of them does so, and the bizarre outcome in which we encounter a version of Hell that only a bridge player could imagine, is the funniest of all.

There is no attempt in this book to give the reader a bridge lesson, which is one reason that players at any level will be able to enjoy it. However, readers should perhaps be warned away from such ideas as Silver's Certainty Principle. And warned, too, about other potentially harmful effects of this book: I laughed so hard I cried.

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BROOM AT THE TOP

At last, the call had come. “Report to the office of the Academic Vice-president,” the message had read.. “Immediately!” Lowliness is young ambition’s ladder, I reminded myself as I raced through the halls. Many teachers have been promoted from the ranks to high office; why not me? Fortunately, I arrived at my destination before my overly-honest subconscious could answer. I was ushered directly into the sanctum and found myself face to face with the senior vice-president of the college.

Robert T. Burns, Vice-president Academic of Mohican College (so named because it was the last of the colleges to be established by the province), is an imposing figure. Towering to a height of almost five feet into the air, he exudes an aura of controlled power. A faint Scottish burr gives his voice the pleasing resonance of a drill burrowing into a stubborn molar. He welcomed me graciously, smiled, and said “Call me Bob.”

“As I’m sure you know, David, President Oldham has been going through a trying time lately,” he continued. “One of our faculty members is suing the college, alleging that we are discriminating against him because he is a WASP. The Indonesian students are agitating for English literature courses in their own language. So, you see his troubles are coming ...”

“Bakke to Bakke, Bali to Bali!” I interposed sardonically.

Alarmingly, some strange affliction attacked him at that moment. He turned brick red, struggled for breath, and pounded the top of his desk with a heavy paperweight. Struggling to compose himself, he gave me a look, which had I not known it to have been caused by an attack of dyspepsia, I might have mistaken for one of inordinate disgust. Regaining his composure with great difficulty, he continued.

“The president has to meet with the Board of Governors this evening. It promises to be a very difficult session and he has been under a great strain. I thought perhaps a quick session of bridge might relax him. President Oldham is an avid bridge player and a couple of hours of bridge will put him in a better frame of mind for the meeting, especially if he wins. I am told, David, that you are a famous bridge expert. Do you think that you might contrive to lose a few dollars this afternoon? Unobtrusively, of course; the president is quite a good player and will notice anything overt.”

He could not have picked a better man for the job, I assured him. My partners have often been compared to those ancient Scottish warriors of whom it was said that ‘they often went forth to battle, and they always died’. I pointed out that when my wife forbade me to play rubber bridge, fourteen people at the bridge club were thrown into work. I had failed to make the initial cut of more Spingolds, Vanderbilts, and Reisingers than any member of the ACBL. My dummy play had rendered Don Cowan speechless, reduced Sheila Forbes to tears, and driven John Laskin to take refuge on the Ontario Appeals Court bench. In short, my credentials were impeccable.

Before he could reply, the door opened and President Oldham entered accompanied by his secretary. The president’s secretary, a very attractive lady of indeterminate age, I knew to be a very experienced tournament player. She reminded me of the Wife of Bath, “half Mars and half Venus”. Bob introduced me and we sat down to play. I partnered Bob against the president and his secretary.

Things went well right from the first hand. As usual, I was

not holding any cards. The problem was that Bob, like most successful men, was a card-rack. He was averaging seventeen points a hand. Although I kept dropping him in the middle of forcing auctions, we were piling up a lot of points just in part scores. Soon, however, I had a chance to cut our lead, and I seized it eagerly. I picked up:

♠ — ♥ J10642 ♦ 86432 ♣ 1098

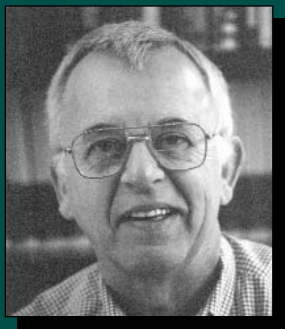
The bidding proceeded: two spades (strong) from the president on my right, four spades from his secretary, and, when this came back to me, I doubled and all passed. I had thought that a couple of vulnerable overtricks in a doubled game would be sufficient to wipe out our lead, but I had miscalculated. Looking at eleven solid tricks, President Oldham decided that I must hold all four outstanding trumps; he tried to strip the hand and endplay me in the trump suit. Of course, Bob had all the trumps and took two tricks in spades to set the contract. Everyone was silent.

“Brilliant tactical double, David!” exclaimed the president. “Left to my own devices I might have gone the right way in the trump suit and made the contract.”

“Yes, brilliant,” exploded Bob, furious. “How is your family? It must be expensive bringing up children nowadays. It must be a terrible worry to be a parent, with all these layoffs and cut-backs going on throughout the educational system.”

The message, subtle as it was, was not lost on me. Bob had been staring at the clock on the wall for five minutes and I realized that time was running out. After four uneventful rubbers, Bob and I were some fourteen hundred points ahead. Sure enough, the president announced that we only had time for one more rubber.

My luck started to turn! The president and his secretary quickly and efficiently bid into a grand slam. A felicitous trump distribution, a successful finesse, and our lead was cut to a mere one hundred and seventy-odd points. Then Bob and I had a setback.



A nineteenth-century literature specialist by training and a non-playing bridge expert by marriage, David Silver is a technical writer and college professor. A life-long squash enthusiast, he claims that he has recently returned to competitive bridge because he now needs a sport that he can play sitting down. An active tournament player in the fifties and sixties, David has partnered all the leading Canadian bridge players of his generation, once. He lives in Toronto with his wife,

Barbara, two grown children, and an elderly dog.

“I laughed so hard, I cried.”
“I laughed so hard, I cried.”

— from Dorothy Hayden Truscott's foreword

— from Dorothy Hayden Truscott's foreword

For more than twenty years, David Silver's wickedly witty bridge writings have appeared in the pages of such publications as *The New York Times*, the *ACBL Bulletin*, *The Kibitzer*, and *Canadian Master Point*. This is the first collection of his work in book form, and consists of a number of stories set on the campus of the fictional “Mohican College”, a backdrop that affords him the opportunity to skewer both the bridge establishment and academia with the same satirical penstroke. His many fans will be pleased to find some old favourites here, as well as several new stories written especially for this book. New readers will enjoy Professor Silver's unorthodox approach to bridge and his subsequent misadventures, which encompass the students of Bridge 101, the faculty of Mohican College, an unsympathetic administration, a host of ex-partners, and even the Devil himself.

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