Example 10

We turn next to a very simple, very common, combination of cards that is nevertheless a blind spot for more than half the bridge-playing world. You hold seven cards of a suit, including ace, king and jack, divided 4—3. Your object is to make three of the four possible tricks.

A K J x	A J x x	A x x
x x x	K x x	K J x x

You may think that the best chance is to cash one of the top cards, then finesse the jack, hoping either that the finesse will hold or that the suit will be divided 3—3. But that play fails when the finesse of the jack loses to a doubleton queen. The play that gives the maximum chance for three tricks is to cash both ace and king, then lead up to the J x. You win three tricks now whenever the queen is on the right side (under the jack), or the suit is divided 3—3, or *when there is a doubleton Q x over the jack.*

Most tournament players know this safety play in theory, but when the opportunity for it occurred on the following deal from a pairs contest, half the field pursued the wrong line.

West		East
	♠ 5 4 ♡ K Q J 8 ♢ A 6 3 ♣ 6 5 4 2	
♠ K J 10 8 ♡ 6 4 ♢ Q 7 ♣ K Q J 10 8	N W E S	♠ 9 7 6 2 ♡ 7 3 ♢ 10 9 8 5 ♣ 9 7 3
	♠ A Q 3 ♡ A 10 9 5 2 ♢ K J 4 2 ♣ A	

The majority of the North-South pairs reached a contract of six hearts. West led the king of clubs, won by declarer's ace. All followed to two rounds of trumps.

Several players now saw the problem as 'one out of two finesses'. That is to say, they needed to find either the diamond finesse or the spade finesse, which as racing men know is a 3 to 1 on chance. It was natural to take the diamond finesse first, because if East held Q x x, South would be able to discard a spade from dummy on the thirteenth diamond and make thirteen tricks without risking the spade finesse.