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### Morton's Fork Coup

The word coup comes to our language from Latin through French, and, as it pertains to bridge, it means "a successful action that is unexpected and achieved with exceptional skill." Oh what names we have given these actions!

The name I like the best is the Morton's Fork Coup. Now if it hadn't been for bridge, I would not have known what the term Morton's Fork meant. The name is derived from an episode in English history. Cardinal Morton, Chancellor (1487) under King Henry VII, loved to tax the wealthy London merchants in order to add to the king's royal treasury. His approach was that if the merchants lived well, they must have plenty of money to pay taxes to the king. On the other hand, if they lived cheaply, he figured that they were saving their money, but still could afford to pay taxes to the king. Thus, they were impaled on "Morton's Fork."

The term Morton's Fork became an expression that describes a choice between two equally unpleasant alternatives. It is analogous to the expression "between the devil and the deep blue sea."

In bridge, the Morton's Fork Coup is a maneuver by which the declarer presents a defender with a choice of taking a trick cheaply or ducking to preserve an honor combination, but so that either decision will cost the

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defense a trick. If the defender wins the trick, he sets up an extra high card in the suit for declarer, but if he ducks, his winner disappears because declarer can discard a loser.

An example makes this clearer:

♠ A Q 8 7		♠ —
♥ 5 4	N	♥ Q 7 6
♦ Q 3 2	W E	♦ 10 9 6 5 4
♣ A 9 7 3	S	♣ J 8 6 5 4
♠ 2		♠ K J 10 9 6 5 4 3
♥ K 10 9 8 3		♥ A J 2
♦ A J 8		♦ K 7
♣ K Q 10 2		♣ —

South declares 6♠ after West has opened the bidding with 1♥. The ♣K is led. Since South has no convenient discard on the ace, he ruffs the first round, draws the outstanding trump, and leads a low diamond towards the queen. If West goes up with the ace, declarer can subsequently discard two hearts on the ♦Q and ♣A. If West ducks, however, declarer wins the queen and discards his remaining diamond on the ♣A, thus losing only one heart trick. Notice that if declarer decided that East holds the ♦A (suppose East opens the bidding instead of West), he can coup that defender by first leading towards the ♦K instead of leading towards the queen.

Another example:

♠ A 9 8 5 2
♥ K 4
♦ 9 7
♣ J 9 4 2
♠ Q 7 4 3
♥ Q 6 5
♦ K Q 3
♣ A K 5

West	North	East	South
Pass	2♥ <sup>(1)</sup>	1♦	1NT
Pass	2NT	Pass	2♠
All Pass		Pass	4♠
			(1) Transfer.

South overcalls East's opening 1♦ bid with 1NT. Partner transfers to spades and then bids 2NT to invite game in either spades or notrump. Note that while South's hand is minimum, it does have a good spade fit and thus the game bid in spades.

The opening lead is a low diamond, and the prospects don't look good. There are two aces to lose, a sure trump loser, and possible losers in clubs and trumps. This contract needs a lot of luck.

A low diamond is played from dummy and East wins his ace and continues with a second diamond, South winning. Since the first problem seems to be to take care of trumps, a spade is led to the ace and a low one back. East shows up with the doubleton K-J.

East returns a club which South wins with the ace and pauses for thought. He decides to play the opening bidder for the ♥A. Do you see what he can do?

Crossing to dummy with a trump, a low heart is led, and East is pickled. South has executed a Morton's Fork Coup, and East has a no-win choice. He can rise with the ♥A, but this gives South a club discard (from dummy) on the ♥Q and another on the ♦K. Alternatively, East can duck, only to have the ♥K discarded on the good diamond trick in South's hand. Making four and very nicely played. □