

## LAUGH AND LIE DOWN A silly old pairing off game

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Laugh and Lie Down (or Lay Down), more of a fun game than a brain-strainer, is one of the most exciting entries in Francis Willughby's *Book of Games* (c.1665) - first, because it is the only known description of an ancient game hitherto known only by name, and, second, because it is the earliest known example of a game of the Fishing family (Cassino, Scopa, etc), previously known only from the 18th century, and then only in Italy. To this may be added that it is that rare thing, a game designed for five players (though it can easily be adapted to four). As Willughby rightly remarks, "There is no other Game at cards that is any thing a kin to this."

The Oxford English Dictionary records the following references to the game:

Now nothyng but pay, pay, With, laughe and lay downe, Borowgh, cyte, and towne.

Skelton, *Why not to Court* (1522)

What game doo you plaie at cards? At primero, at trump, at laugh and lie downe.

Florio, *Second Fruites* (1591)

At laugh and lie downe if they play, What asse against the sport can bray?

Lyly, *Moth. Bomb.* (1594)

Sorrow becomes me best. A suit of laugh and lye downe would wear better.

S. R., *Noble Soldier* (1634)

Laugh-and-lay-down, a childish game at cards.

Forby, *Voc. E. Anglia* (c.1825)

## LAUGH AND LIE DOWN - 2

Description by David Parlett based on Willughby's *Book of Plaies* (c.1665)

### Preliminaries

Five players use a standard 52-card pack. Whoever cuts the lowest card (Ace low) deals first. The deal and turn to play pass regularly to the left. At each deal the dealer puts up a stake of 3p and the other players 2p each, making a pot of 11p.

### Deal

Deal eight cards to each player, one at a time, and the remaining 12 face up to the table. Make sure sure that all 12 table cards are clearly identifiable, but don't arrange them in any particular order - in fact, higgledy-piggledy makes for a better game.

### Object

To win cards in pairs of the same rank (two Aces, two Kings, etc) and place them face up on the table before you.

### General procedure

At each turn you capture one or more table cards by pairing them with one or more cards of the same rank from your hand. When you can no longer do so you must throw your hand in by adding your cards face up to those still on the table and ceasing play. This is called laying down (or lying down), and the game gets its name from the fact that everyone else then laughs at you. Play ceases when only one player has any cards left in hand.

### Foreplay

Before play begins, you may set before you, as won cards, certain pairs that you may already have been dealt. Specifically -

\* If the table cards include a mournival (all four of a given rank), dealer may take them immediately and lay them face up on the table before him as if he had won them in play.

\* If you were dealt a mournival (most unlikely) you may immediately place all four matching cards face up on the table as if you had won them in play.

\* If you hold a prial (three of a kind), you may immediately set down a pair as if you had won them in play, but must keep the third card in hand. You may do this for every prial you hold.

If you are dealt a prial or a mournival and forget to claim the constituent pairs before play, you can do so at any other turn, but this does not count as capturing by matching.

### Play

Thereafter, at each turn you must capture one or two pairs of cards by matching one card from your hand with one or three cards of the same rank on the table, transferring both (or all four) face up to your pile of won cards.

### Other ways of pairing

If you hold a pair, and another player pairs a card of that rank on the table, you may immediately transfer your pair to your won cards, since there would be no other way of winning them. This does not count as a capture - so, even if you do it on your turn to play, you are still required to make a matching capture or else "lay down". You can also win pairs by spotting other players' oversights. For example:

\* If the table cards include a mournival and the dealer fails to take it, whoever claims it first wins all four cards.

\* If they include a prial and a player captures only one such card instead of all three, whoever claims it first wins the unclaimed pair.

\* If a player lays down, and his cards include a pair that he should have added to his winnings when the corresponding pair was taken, whoever claims that pair first wins it.

Spotting oversights does not count as capturing by matching, which you are still required to do on your next turn.

#### Ending

Play continues till all but one player have laid (or lain) down. The last player left with cards in hand adds them to the cards left untaken on the table and wins 5p from the pot. All untaken table cards are added to the dealer's won cards.

#### Pay-off

Everyone counts the cards they have won. Whoever captured fewer than eight cards pays into the pot 1p for every two cards he won short of the eight he started with, and whoever who took more than eight takes from the pot 1p for every two cards he won in excess of that eight. This exactly disposes of the 6p left in the pot after 5p has been paid to the last player left in.

#### Game.

Each deal is complete in itself. There is no overall game structure.

#### Variants

for other numbers of players

Willughby gives a version for four players and merely remarks that the game can be easily adapted for other numbers. Versions for three and six are my suggestions.

#### Four players

Make a pot of 9p (3-2-2-2). Deal 10 each and 12 to the table. Last in hand wins 3p from the pot. Win or lose 1p for every two cards taken above or below ten. (So Willughby. But you may prefer to make a pot of 13 (4-3-3-3) and win 7p for being the last with cards in hand.)

#### Three players

Pot of 10p (4-3-3). Deal 13 each and 13 to the table. Last in hand wins 5p from the pot. Win or lose 1p for every two cards taken above or below fourteen.

#### Six players

Pot of 13p (3-2-2-2-2-2). Deal 7 each and 10 to the table. Last in hand wins 5p from the pot. Win or lose 1p for every two cards taken above or below six.

#### Notes

Willughby says: "Whatever is overseen [i.e. overlooked] is his that can catch it first". It is unclear whether this means first in time or first in rotation, but it probably means the former, as he quite specifically categorises Laugh and Lie down as a fun game. Catching somebody out, therefore, does not count as a turn.

When you have a pair in hand that matches a pair on the table, you may wonder whether it is permissible to play your pair and capture all four cards simultaneously. Willughby has nothing to say about this. However, you would rarely want to do so, because taking only one pair in one turn leaves you with another play on a future turn, and, as Willughby points out, you want to keep as many options open as possible. As I see it, the only reason for wanting to win four at a time might be to reduce the number of cards credited to the dealer in the event that you finish as the only player with cards in hand.

To leave yourself as many future plays as possible, Willughby makes various recommendations, which can be summarised as follows. If there is only one card of a given rank on the table, and you hold a matching singleton or a pair, then capture the table card before somebody else does. If, however, there are two or three of a given rank on the table, and you can match that rank from hand, then you can safely hold back until you have no alternative.