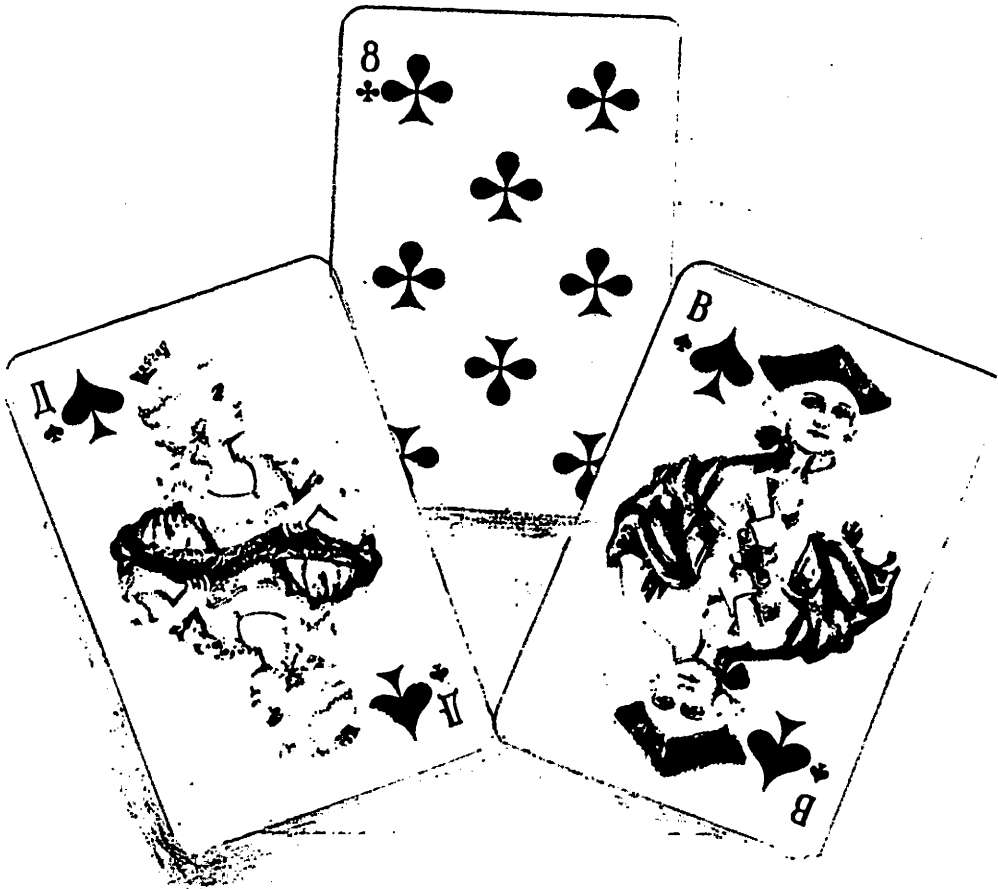


# The Spirit of Cards.

by  
André Orbéliani.



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ANDRE ORBELIANI.

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## THE SPIRIT OF CARDS

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### A Gypsy Story of Fortune Telling

The Russian Revolution expatriated many people from their homeland. Those who fled settled in friendly countries. They had to adapt themselves to hard conditions of life and manual work.

The young ones tried to regain status through studies. I was one of those enlisted at the University of Zagreb in Croatia. The Yugoslav government granted me a bursary.

I was twenty years old starting my engineering studies, but at that age young people are prone to romance. I was happily in love with the beautiful Olga Petrovna.

Olga Petrovna, with her black eyes, auburn hair, and lovely figure, was known for her beauty, but her character was moody; not many would stand her bursts of anger. I did;

I was her permanent victim and her lover.

When living in Moscow, Olga Petrovna was immensely rich. Her husband, a very rich merchant vanished in the turmoil of the civil war. She escaped, a penniless widow living on a meager government grant.

Our relations were not all sweetness. Here is a sample of our conversation.

"Olga Petrovna!"

"What do you want?"

"Don't be angry with me."

"Why should I be angry?"

"I don't know, but I feel you are."

"Then think."

"I don't feel guilty, I did nothing wrong."

"So you are stupid."

Silence.

"Olga Petrovna."

"Again."

"What did I do wrong?"

"Leave me alone."

"But you look angry."

"Get out of here!"

Sometimes she was jealous, sometimes she was bored. I could never guess the reason for her anger, maybe she didn't know it herself.

I carefully avoided giving her a reason to be jealous, but once I did. I went to a Gypsy Camp.

I was walking home after the lectures when a beggar boy called me.

"Hello Mister, he cried, give me a cruna."

I looked at the boy and pulled out my purse.

"I have not a crune, it's obsolete money."

"Give me a Dinar." A Dinar is big money I had not much of them.

"Here is ten para." I gave him the coin.

"Give me a Dinar, I'll give it to her, and I'll show you the way."

Who is she?"

"My sister Zora, she will tell you the fortune."

"I don't believe in fortune telling." and I started on my way.

"Mister, Mister," the boy ran behind "Give me a Dinar and I will give it to her, she will be happy; she is pretty my sister Zora."

"Here is your Dinar" I said and walked again.

"Mister!" cried the boy. "I promised to show you the way to my sister. Come."

I followed the boy by curiosity, I had only five Dinars left in my purse.

The boy lead me to the River Sava which was flowing fast and carried lumps of ice. We crossed the River over a railway bridge and on the other side was the tabor as they call a Gypsy Camp. It looks as a village of horse driven wagons - boxes on wheels. Some primitive campers.

Camp fires were burning, and Gypsies were sitting around. The horses were kept in corrals.

I was greeted by a tall swarthy fellow with a menacing moustache and a friendly smile. He welcomed me at the tabor and taled his name Gritsko.

He wanted to know who I was, who were my parents, and what did I do for a living.

I was naive, I suspected no harm and I told him all about me. When he learned that I was Russian, Gritsko switched to the Russian language, which he spoke fluently. He told me that his Clan was living in the Ukraine before the great war.

Gritsko had travelled through the lad of my youth, the cities I knew and the plains, and the rivers and roads.

He mentioned all the village fairs so familiar to me. Gritsko spoke Croatian well; not the peasant dialect.

The beggar boy came with his sister Zora, a very young beauty in a multicoloured long dress and a black shawl. She offered to tell my fortune, but Gritsko interfered. I was his guest and he would not allow to take my money.

I spent and evening with the Gypsies and was invited to share their meal. The table was set in the open and Zora and the beggar boy took place in front of me; they were Gritsko's children. His wife, a handsome woman, served us, and sat beside me. She too spoke Russian fluently.

I always thought that Gypsies are uncultured, primitive people and was surprised by a tactful and kind attitude. This family belonged to some upper rank, or maybe had been living among educated Russians.

When I met my friends at the University next morning, I told them about my new acquaintances at the Gypsy Tabor. They did not believe me, and spoke about my new infatuation and mocked me. I avoided to speak about the Gypsies in the future.

My beautiful Olga Petrovna was informed about my visit to the Gypsy Tabor. I had a vigorous tongue spanking from her.

....ooOoo....

Two months went by, before I met the beggar boy again. He had seen me from afar and ran after me.

"Hello, Mister," he cried, "Why don't you come to the Tabor again?"

"Will I be welcome? I have so little money to spend."

"Father likes you, father remembers your visit, he wants to see you again."

A few days later I went to the Tabor. The tall fellow was away, his wife and daughter kept me company.

Zora spoke about the subject that interested her most: fortune telling. She was probably a pupil herself, now she wanted to teach me.

"Look here" she would say spreading the playing cards on the table, "the ten of Spades - fight, it can mean a quarrel or a outright fight. It can mean also a conflict of interests: you understand?"

"How can you know what meaning it is?"

"The Spirit will tell you. Now look the eight of Clubs comes next - tears. You will be sorry or you will make someone sorry."

"Very tricky your game" I said.

"Don't be impatient. Next card a seven of hearts - joy. You will laugh."



"Tears, joy, that makes no sense to me" I said.

"Someone will have a fight, he will cry and you will laugh, bad boy."

"Will that happen to me?"

"No, no I'm just showing."

The lesson went on, there were so many cards and so many meanings, I could not remember, I wanted to write it down.

Zora protested vehemently. "No, no never" she said, " If you write it I will not tell. That will chase the Spirit of Prophecy away, you must memorize. The Spirit will never speak to you if you write it down."

"How do you know about the Spirit? You read cards, you speak, where is the Spirit?"

"This is prophecy, I don't know the future, you don't know it either, the Spirit knows, he speaks."

"Do you think that the Spirit will come and talk to me also?"

"You are not a Gypsy of course, but you are a friend, the Spirit will speak through you."

"I am very happy that you say I am a friend."

"Father says you are a friend, father knows."

I felt very happy to have friends I had nobody in town whom I could call a friend.

I made another stupidity by speaking about future telling. It was reported to Olga Petrovna.

"Androusha, where have you been on Tuesday?"  
was her greeting when I came.

"At the University, as usual."

"And after that? Why didn't you come to see me?"

"On Tuesdays you play cards, you told me that you don't want me around."

"This Tuesday I had no guests."

"How could I know?"

"Don't tell me lies, you were again at that awful Gypsy camp."

"True, but I was home at nine."

"You will contract a shameful disease. All the Gypsy women are sick. I will not allow you to approach me anymore."

"How will I get sick playing cards?"

"Do you go there to gamble? You lie, you have no money to gamble."

"I do not gamble, I learn to tell the fortune."

"You lie. I forbid you to approach that awful Gypsy Tabor."

I was tired of Olga Petrovna, I could not stand to be bossed like that. But she was my mistress and I was her only lover.

Because of her character she was lonely and disliked, I had pity for her. I loved this woman who was fifteen years older than I.

In spite of Olga's interdiction I went to the Tabor again. I had no friends in town, my affair with Olga Petrovna was ridiculed, it made a void around me.

In Gritsko's company I felt secure, I could tell him all about myself without fear of being mocked. Just the opposite, he gave friendly and clever advice. Zora was childish but friendly also, her mother was paternal.

The reason for this attitude was my Russian background. This particular Clan was favoured by some wealthy prince in Russia. He promoted their art of song and dance, so they became famous and wealthy. Here in Yugoslavia his art was not appreciated. The Gypsies were fiddling in every cafe or winery cellar.

One day Gritsko invited me to a Gypsy celebration. He told me that I would be his personal guest and it will cost me nothing.

This time I boldly told Olga that I was going to the Tabor and there will be a feast. She shook her shoulders and did not protest.

I expected to be one of many guests at this party, I was the only one.

The Gypsies were dressed in their fancy costumes and an orchestra was playing. All the dancing and singing was in my honour.

I suppose that my title has impressed the Gypsies, they were celebrating the heir of their former benefactor.

I like the captivating Gypsy songs and their fiery dance, this time the performance was outstanding. I could not dream of so much ardor and romance. Zora was one of the best.

At the end of the party, Gritsko called his daughter and gave her an order in their tongue. She invited me to follow her.

She lead me to their camper and displayed the art of Gypsy love.

My pretty Olga Petrovna was a passionate woman, she enjoyed sex, but in her opinion the male is a selfish animal who gets his pleasure anyhow. Zora was different, she did everything to increase my pleasure. My contentment was her concern.

I had a heavenly experience. It changed my ideas about love. The religion teaches of sex as sin, a selfish pleasure, a forbidden fruit. Never as self sacrifice for the joy of the mate. Zora showed me just that.

I told no one of my experience, and I went to the Tabor very soon.

I met Zora alone. Love? No way. I had my lesson of tarots and a friendly tap on the shoulder.

I went another time and Gritsko kept me company, Zora did not appear.

I went the third time and spoke to the mother of Zora. She charged me a fee equal to the third of my monthly allowance.

Zora was devine, but I knw that another such visit was out of my reach. Kissing me goodbye Zora asked if I was sorry for the money. I said that I was sorry to be penniless. If in Russia, I would buy her out from the Clan and marry her.

She laughed and told me that such a thing happened to her aunt, but she was not happy afterwards. I asked if she loved me, she frowned and said that Gypsies are vagrant people who do not give love promises as they move away and may not meet again.

....ooOoo....

At Christmas Eve there was a party at the Russian Circle. Social games and future guessing were the rule. I boasted about my fortune telling ability.

"He took lessons at a Gypsy Tabor" said my pretty Olga Petrovna, and soon I was surrounded by several ladies wishing to know the future.

"I am not supposed to tell the fortune without pay" I said, "one Dinar will be enough."

Soon a heap of Dinars were on the table and I was wondering if I will have enough imagination to satisfy them all without repeating myself.

"Please, shuffle the cards" I said to a blonde,

snub-nosed lady. "Now cut the pack in three." She did what I told and soon I had several cards on the table.

"This is your past." I said and remained silent. What can it mean: a King, a seven and a ten of Spades, and Ace of Clubs, and then the King, the nine and the seven of hearts?

Suddenly without thinking I said " There was a quarrel at the office and someone was fired, but it turned well for you and your husband. Love and joy."

"You guessed well," said the blonde lady. "My husband had an argument and was fired from his job in Belgrade. Now he is here he has another job and we are happy."

I was greatly encouraged by this start and read her future without hesitation.

But what is that? For conclusion I see Seven of Clubs - news, seven of Diamonds - a crib, Jack of Diamonds family and queen of Diamonds, what does she do here? Suddenly without thinking I said:

"Your baby is a girl."

"Oh! How do you know about the baby? Even my husband does not know, I did not tell him yet."

Now my reputation as a prophet was established. Everyone believed me.

I promised money, I promised even a rich marriage to an elderly lady - It was her daughter's marriage to a rich frenchman in Algeries.

I was frightened to predict death. It was forseen. In Russia, parents that were left behind were dying.

The Spirit was speaking and he knew the future. I didn't.

Oh! Here comes my dear Olga Petrovna and she too wants me to tell her fortune.

I could not back out so I gave her a pack of cards to shuffle.

What's in her past? Money, fulfillment, joy, and then all black cards. We know that.

I read nothing new. What can I say?

"Well Androusha, why don't you speak? What do you see? Nothing interesting Olga Petrovna. Nothing suprising."

"And what are all these Diamonds on the table?"

"Money, Olga Petrovna, money that this black Jack and this King of Spades took away from you."

"Enough of that, tell me the future."

I spread all the cards on the table that is puzzling to the client as I read them according to a pattern that he cannot guess.

What's on her heart? Queen of Spades. Oh no! My dear Olga could not be that envious and malicious Queen of Spades. What's on her mind?

Eight of Clubs, eight of spades - tears and hatred.  
My poor Olga.

Where is the nine of hearts - love? Nowhere in sight. Joy? None. Me? Her King of Hearts. Somewhere at the other end of the table and the ten of Clubs in between - voyage or distance. No romance.

I spoke in vague terms. There was a letter coming and unexpected news. There was money. Money made her happy.

There was not a word about me. What a disappointment!

I remembered the combinations of cards to ask Zora or her mother the meaning, but I had not time to go to the Tabor and I postponed my visit.

And then....Olga Petrovna fired me. She told me to never come and see her, and she gave me a letter from her husband.

He was in New York, he found her address and he called her to join him in the United States.

Apparently he escaped to China with a part of his fortune and was in business again.

Olga Petrovna said that my presence in her home was an indecent scandal, and she left the room.

Now I understood what the cards were telling. The King of Hearts was her husband, not me, and he was far away and calling.



I was astounded. I loved this woman. In spite of all injuries, I loved her and I believed in her love. She was the Queen of Spades! The jealous, heartless, Queen of Spades.

I sacrificed to this woman all of my friends and jeopardized my studies. I was a fool and my fellows were right to mock me.

Still, if she would call me I would run, but she did not and I was nursing my broken heart.

A few days later I went to the Tabor I would share my sorrow with Gritsko.

I met him at the outskirts of the camp. I wanted to speak with him only and we went for a walk. Gritsko listened attentively and he took my case seriously.

He said that he knew of how painful I felt but I must decide myself if I suffer from love or frustration. If it is only frustration it's not worth the lost time.

Gritsko told me that such sentimental shocks are useful to build up character.

I will soon enjoy the freedom from the bondage that I have made myself. I should avoid women for a time and not walk from one bondage to another. I should avoid my companions too and concentrate on books.

"I know, you are a strong man" he said, "with your books you will regain honour and status. Your friends will come to you."

He told me to come and see him soon.

I followed Gritsko's advice and went to my studies, and then only I realized how badly my studies were neglected. I read but did not understand, I had to read previous lessons. I was in a panic.

I went back to the Tabor seeking advice.

Gritsko listened to me, he called his wife and daughter and I told them about my distress. I doubt they understood, but the mother wanted to consult the Spirit.

Zora brought her own crystal ball which was small. Maybe an inch and one-half across.

The Mother concentrated a long time gazing at the crystal ball; then she spoke:

"I see your honour in much trouble but I see your willpower too. You will overcome at the cost of much efforts and you will have luck too. Do not be discouraged. You are strong, you are good, the Spirit is with you if you do not lose courage. You will fail, it is inevitable, but don't lose courage. Remember that you will be happy, you will be successful, you will have a long life with a woman that you will love."

I went back to study, I worked hard in spite of that, I failed my exams.

After the exams, I went to see my friends the Gypsies. They were gone. It was spring and they started on their summer vagrance.

I joined my parents in a small town, I worked

in a factory all summer. I could not return to the Zagreb University as I lost the bursary. A letter came from my aunt who provided a bursary for me at a University in Belgium. What a chance!

I returned to Zagreb for some formalities and there were my Gypsy friends on the same site.

I spent an evening with them. Happy hours. Before leaving, Zora came and gave me a small parcel that I should not open before leaving Zagreb.

It was her precious crystal ball which she gave me as an amulet for luck.

I had luck, I passed all my exams, easily. I had a good job since the start. I had luck in Europe and in Africa where I worked in the mines.

And then somebody had stolen my crystal ball and I had no luck anymore. I lost my job in Angola, I stayed unemployed for eight months. Still, the prophecy went true. I have a long and happy life with the woman I love.