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MILORAD PAVIĆ

LAST LOVE IN
CONSTANTINOPLE

A Tarot novel for divination

Translated from the Serbian by
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The Major Arcana (Great Secret) is the name of a deck of twenty-two cards used for divination. These cards are marked by numbers 0 to 21 and, together with the other, larger deck of fifty-six cards (the Minor Arcana), they comprise the Tarot (Tarok, Tarocchi). The origin of the Tarot is associated with the priests (Hierophants) of the Eleusinian Mysteries in Greece, and some believe that the Tarot stems from the tradition of the cults of Hermes. The cards are often used for fortune-telling by gypsies who are believed to have brought this secret “language” from Chaldea and Egypt to Israel and Greece, with it later spreading along the shores of the Mediterranean. As far as is known, the Tarot has been in circulation for about seven centuries in Central Europe, France and Italy and is today a universally known game. The oldest preserved examples of Tarot cards date from 1390 and 1445 (the Minchiate set from the Museo Correr in Venice).

The Major Arcana is usually divided into three groups of seven cards each. In divination, the meaning of each card individually and in relation to the others is interpreted by the reader, who knows the established meanings (keys) of the cards, or who ascribes them a meaning which he keeps secret. The meaning of the Tarot card changes depending on whether the card is laid out right side up or upside down, because in the case of the latter it means the opposite of the card’s basic meaning. Today the Tarot and its keys are the subject of countless,

often very different handbooks. At the root of the Tarot lies the symbolic language of the collective mind of man. The symbols and keys of the Tarot are aimed at ancient Greece, at the Kabalah, at astrology, numerology and so on. Mystic energy and esoteric wisdom are attained through twenty-one initiations by "the Fool" – the symbol of the card that is simultaneously the zero, the middle and the last card of the Tarot's "Great Secret".

From an encyclopedia

TO USE THE BOOK FOR DIVINATION

You may read the novel in sequence. Alternatively, you may choose to lay the cards out in one of the three patterns described in APPENDIX 1 (the Magic Cross, the Great Triad or the Celtic Cross) and read the corresponding chapters in the sequence suggested by the Tarot. This method allows the possibility of divination or fortune-telling by means of the cards.

If you wish to read your own fortune, take the deck of Tarot cards, shuffle and cut them. Make a note of the card numbers in the order they appear after shuffling. Fan the cards out face down so that you may choose the cards you wish to lay out. If you choose to lay them out according to the Magic Cross, pick five cards and lay them out in the shape of the Magic Cross. The sequence in which they are to be turned over is given in APPENDIX 1. An interpretation of each card may be found at the end of the book in APPENDIX 2. The corresponding book chapter further explains the card. You can read this yourself or have it read to you. Then move on to the next card.

If you wish someone else to read the cards for you, take the Tarot deck and let the Reader shuffle the cards; then you must cut the deck with your left hand. The Reader will

then make a note of the cards as they were shuffled and fan them out face down on the table. You will pick your cards and toss them on the table, following the layout chosen by the Reader. The Reader will then lay out the cards and interpret them for you.

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THE KEYS
OF THE GREAT SECRET
FOR LADIES
OF BOTH SEXES



SPECIAL KEY

The Fool



In addition to his mother tongue, he also spoke Greek, French, Italian and Turkish. He was born in Trieste into a family of Serbian merchants and patrons of the theatre, who had ships in the Adriatic and wheat and vineyards on the Danube. Since childhood he had served in the unit of his father, French cavalry officer Haralampije Opujić. He knew that when charging on horseback or making love exhaling was more important than inhaling. He wore the splendid robes of a cavalryman. In the middle of winter he slept in the snow underneath the covered wagon rather than evict from it his Russian hound bitch and her litter, and in the middle of war he wept over his ruined yellow cavalier boots; he left service in the infantry in order not to part from his cavalry gear. He was mad about beautiful horses and plaited their tails. He obtained his silver tableware in Vienna, adored fancy dress balls, masquerades and fireworks and felt like a fish in water when in drawing rooms and inns graced by women and music.

His father used to say of him that he was as foolish as the first wind and was treading on the edge of a precipice. One minute he looked like his mother, the next like his grandfather and the next like his still unborn son or granddaughter. He was a most handsome man, taller than

average, with a pale face, a dimple like a navel in his chin and his long, thick hair as black as coal. He sported his finely twirled eyebrows like a moustache, and his moustache braided like a whip. On his endless military expeditions in Bavaria, Silesia and Italy women admired his appearance, his horsemanship and long, combed hair which, when he was tired of marches and the hardships of military life, he would dry by the hearth in a wayside inn; for fun they would dress him in women's clothes, stick a white rose in his hair, take his last penny at the tavern dance, give him their beds when he was ill or tired and tearfully part with the cavalry units at the end of their winter respite. But he, he was wont to say that all his memories were in his food bag.

With an alien feminine smile on his face and his growth of beard, young Opujić had crossed Europe, first as a boy with his father and later on his own in the French cavalry, travelling from Trieste, Venice and the Danube to Wagram and Leipzig, and had grown up in French military camps seeing a war every decade. In vain did his mother, Mrs Paraskeva Opujić, send him "cakes with sad walnuts". The young Sofronije had his devil born to him before his child. One eye resembled his maternal grandmother's, who had been first and foremost Greek, and the other his father's, who was finally a Serb, and so young Opujić of Trieste saw the world cross-eyed. He would whisper:

– God is who he is and I am who I am not.

Since early childhood he had carried a big, well-hidden secret. It was as if he felt there was something wrong with him as a human being. And it was natural that he wanted to change that. He wanted to do so badly, secretly, slightly embarrassed by this wish, as if it were an unseemly visit. It

was like a small pang of hunger that wails like a pain under the heart or like a small pain that stirs like hunger in the soul. He did not remember exactly when this hidden longing for change had germinated inside him in the form of bodiless energy. It happened as if he had been lying down, putting the tips of his middle finger and thumb together and, having nodded off, his arm slid off the bed and his fingers opened; he woke up with a start as though he had dropped something. In fact he had dropped himself. And the desire was there, this terrible, inexorable desire, so heavy that his right leg began to limp under the weight of it... Another time it would seem to him that, once long ago, he had discovered somebody's soul floating in his plate of cabbage and had swallowed it.

And so it was that this secret, powerful thing took seed inside him. It is hard to say whether it was some kind of dizzying ambition connected with his father's military career and his own, some kind of unachievable longing for a new, real enemy and more purposeful alliances; whether young Opujić wanted to reverse his relationship with his father or whether he loved the south and was lured, he of the imperial cavalry, by the fallen empires of the Balkans all the way down to the Peloponnese; whether there was something in the blood of his Greek grandmother whose kin had amassed a fortune in trade between Europe and Asia; or whether it was some other happenstance and desire of the strong and turbid kind that ensures a man's face is never still. One minute it shows what he will look like in old age, the next what he looked like when he still had only his ears to take him through the world. Because a human face breathes, it constantly inhales and exhales time.

Thereafter he worked steadily and prodigiously on bringing some fundamental change to his life, on making his life-long dream come true, but he concealed it as best he could and others often found his actions puzzling.

Since then young Opujić had clandestinely carried a stone under his tongue like a secret or, more to the point, a secret under his tongue like a stone, and his body underwent a change that was difficult to conceal and which gradually entered the realm of legend. It was noticed first by women, but they said nothing; then the men in his regiment began openly joking about it and the story spread all over the battlefield.

– He’s like a woman. He can always do it! – the officers in his unit would say with a laugh.

From that fateful day on, young Opujić travelled the world carrying his secret inside him and his ever-ready male spear against his stomach. His eleventh finger unbended and started counting the stars. And it stayed that way. That did not bother him. He cheerfully rode his horse but, as for his secret, which might have been the cause of everything, he never said a word to anyone.

– He’s fooling around – the officers in his unit said, as they marched steadily northwestward in the direction of the unknown.

He had embarked on this muddy military path at his father’s behest, but now he hardly ever met his father, Captain Haralampije Opujić. Sometimes he remembered how at night, in their palace in Trieste, his father would lift his head from the pillow in the dark and listen for as long as could be.

“What is he listening to”? The boy would wonder in amazement. The house? The war? Time? The sea? The

French? His past? Or is he listening to the fear that can be heard from the future? Because the future is a stable out of which steps fear. Then his mother would suddenly lay his father's head back down on the pillow, so that he would not fall asleep stiff-necked and prick-eared. Terrifying to both his subordinates and his superiors, Opujić senior had more love for the son than the mother. And he watched over him from the immense distance of his travelling battlefields. The son had not seen him for a long time and did not know what his father looked like any more or whether he would even recognize him. Let alone his mother in Trieste. It was not in vain that she said of her son:

– That one is a mixture of two bloods, Serbian and Grek. Awake he wants a rainbow, asleep a shop.

In fact, Lieutenant Sofronije Opujić was like his hounds. He heard and saw behind every corner. He was a veteran soldier; he had been knocked around in the victory at Ulm when he was fourteen and in the defeat in Prussia when he was twenty-two, but somewhere at the bottom of his soul he was still a foolish rascal. He still saw his father behind one corner and heard his mother behind the other. And he longed to meet them. He did not know who he was.

THE FIRST
SEVEN KEYS



KEY 1

The Magician



– **W**ould you like me to breastfeed you, *mon lieutenant*?
– the girl asked the young Opujić in front of a tent on the outskirts of Ulm.

The lieutenant's eye had been caught by a bird which, in the fast wind above the tent, was flying in place as if tied to it. Inside the tent a male voice was singing *Memories Are the Sweat of the Soul*. Opujić paid and walked in.

Standing on the table inside was a magician belted with a serpent devouring its own tail and he was singing. He had red roses in his hair. Finishing the song he aimed his high voice over his eyetooth as if targeting the bird above the tent and, like an arrow, his voice felled it. He then offered his services to the visitors. He could eat the name of anyone present for a quarter of a *Napoleon d'or*, and for only slightly more he could eat the surname as well.

– Whoever accepts will never again be called by the same name as the one he walked in with. If you have your house keys, but your house was destroyed by war, I can reconstruct it for you down to the smallest detail simply by tossing the keys into a cauldron, because each key creates an echo giving the ear a clear description of the shape and size of the room that the key guards.

Finally, the magician proposed that everyone present make a wish and he would help to make it come true, while Mademoiselle Marie would gladly breastfeed each gentleman on his way out to thank him for having come. When it was Opujić's turn to make a wish, the magician became upset, although he had not been informed of his audience's wishes; he quickly stepped down off the table, wanting to slip out of the tent.

– There is never enough wisdom in one day, just as there is never enough honey in one flower – thought Opujić and, catching up with the magician, grabbed him by the collar, sat himself down on a barrel and the magician on his knee.

– Stick your tongue out! – he ordered, and the magician quickly obeyed. – Is it raining?

The magician nodded his head, even though it was not raining.

– Liar! You think you can fool around with me the way you do with that bird that flies in place above your tent? Do you know who I am?

– Yes. That's why I wanted to run away. You are the son of Captain Haralampije Opujić of Trieste.

– All right. Now to the point. Can you or can you not make a wish come true?

– Not in your case. But I do know where it can be done. I shall confide something to you. In a temple in Constantinople there is a pillar and attached to it is a copper shield. In the middle of that shield is a hole. Anyone who wants to make a wish must stick his thumb into the hole, close his fist around the thumb so that the fist never leaves the copper surface or the thumb the hole, and his wish will be answered. But take care, sir, and beware. God, when He

wants to punish someone, will grant a wish and a terrible misfortune at the same time. Perhaps that is how He treats those He favours, we don't know, but to us it is all the same anyway. So beware, lieutenant. And don't forget the song *Memories Are the Sweat of the Soul*.

– I do not believe a letter of what you are saying – replied the lieutenant – but, all the same, I shall ask you one more question. Can you help me find my father? I haven't seen him since the stone got thin and the wind got heavy. I know that he was retreating toward Leipzig, but I don't know where he is now.

– That I cannot tell you, but what I can tell you is that a group of pickpockets and charlatans comes to this tent every Thursday to perform for the credulous. They enact the deaths of Captain Haralampije Opujić, your father.

– What do you mean deaths? He's alive!

– I know he's alive, lieutenant. But that is what the show is called: *The Three Deaths of Captain Opujić*.

– I do not believe a word of what you are saying – said the lieutenant once more and took himself off to bed.

* * *

But on Thursday he made some inquiries. In the magician's tent they really were enacting the three deaths of Haralampije Opujić, his father. When young Opujić entered the tent, he asked the first masked actor he could lay his hands on how they dared to portray the death of a living man, but the actor calmly replied:

– You should know that this performance has been paid for personally by Captain Haralampije Opujić himself, who, sir, is a great admirer of the stage and a benefactor of the theatre and comedy. He is now at war on the Elbe.

Knowing, of course, that the Trieste Opujićes had long been patrons of the theatre, there was nothing else Lieutenant Sofronije could do but sit down and watch the play. When the people in the tent saw him they seemed to go rigid. They had recognized him. He told the actors they were free to begin.

First, a man sporting someone else's beard and a French tunic appeared before them. He played Captain Opujić. Around him stood four women and a girl. One of them turned to the captain and said:

– Just so we immediately know where we stand, please bear in mind that I am not the spirit of your maternal great-grandfather, nor do I represent him in the form of a vampire. He died and nothing of him remains any more, not his body or his spirit. But since deaths do not die, I am here. I am his death. And next to me is the death of your great-great-grandmother. That is all that remains of her. Assuming we understand each other on this point, we can move on. Your ancestors, then, had only one death each. But not you. You will have three deaths and here they are. This old lady here, this lovely woman and this girl here, they are your three deaths. Take a good look at them...

– And that is all that will remain of me?

– Yes, that is all. And it is not negligible. But, captain, you will not notice your deaths, you will ride through them as you would through the gate of victory and you will continue your journey as though they never happened.

– But what happens then after my third death, after I become a vampire for the third time?

– For a while it will seem to both you and others that you are still alive, that nothing happened, until you experience your last love, until you catch the eye of a woman with

whom you could have offspring. That same instant you will disappear off the face of the earth, because the third soul cannot have offspring, just as someone who becomes a vampire for the third time cannot have children...

Then the tent went dark and a bear could be heard growling. When the stage lights went back on, a man in a French tunic, embodying Captain Opujić, was wrestling for dear life with a huge bear. The man stabbed the animal with his knife and in its death agony it peed on him and choked him. Both the man and the animal fell to the floor... The audience applauded, the actors gave each spectator a spoonful of boiled wheat for the dead man's soul and someone observed that this was Captain Haralampije Opujić's first death. The second was to follow.

The beautiful woman from Scene One stepped out in front of the audience and said:

– You people do not know how to measure your days. You measure them only in length and say they are twenty-four hours long. But the depth of your days is sometimes greater than their length and that depth can be a month or even a year long in one day. That is why you do not know how to take stock of your lives. Let alone your deaths...

Upon these words Captain Opujić came riding into the tent, scattering the spectators aside and holding a military field glass in his hand. Appearing behind him, in an Austrian tunic, was a man with a rifle. The Captain turned around and raised the field glass to one eye. That same moment the other man killed him through the field glass. The Captain fell off his horse and the animal, now free of its constraint, galloped off into the night... That was Captain

Opujić's second death. Again they handed out spoonfuls of boiled wheat for his soul.

Then the little girl from Scene One stepped out in front of the audience and curtsied.

– Don't leave yet. My dead aren't well this evening; stick your finger in my ear so I know you're here even after I fall asleep. Listen! In the darkness the heart beats out somebody's total number of years which are completed inside us...

That heralded the Captain's third and youngest death. On stage (as outside) night had fallen. Two men bearing lanterns and sabres were walking towards one another. It was obviously a duel. One of them portrayed Captain Opujić (in the French tunic); the other the Austrian officer. The one representing Opujić suddenly stopped, stuck his sabre into the ground, hung the lantern on the sabre and moved off into the night, planning to attack the other man from behind. He came up on his opponent in the dark, following the lantern of the man who was standing hesitantly just a few steps away, unable to see what his enemy was up to and why he was standing so still. That moment, when he least expected it, Haralampije Opujić ran straight into the Austrian knife in the dark, far from the sabre and the lantern that the other man had cunningly stuck in the middle of the street. And that was Captain Haralampije Opujić's third death.

"I don't understand a thing", the young Opujić thought, leaving the tent.

Just then a voice behind him said:

– It's just as well that you don't understand!

Turning around, the lieutenant saw the magician with the roses in his hair and asked him:

– What is the truth? Is my father alive or not?

– Everyone has two pasts – replied the magician – one is called “Slowing”; this past grows with the person from birth and moves towards death. The other past is called “Sliding” and it follows the person back to his birth. These two pasts are not of equal length. Depending on which of the two is longer, a person either does or does not fall ill from his death. In the case of the latter it means that the person is building his past on the other side of the grave as well and so it continues to grow even after his death. The truth lies between these two pasts... But why doesn't the lieutenant seek out the *Papess*? – the magician asked in conclusion and left.

Milorad Pavić
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