



True Romance

This is a human-centric reimagining of Karl Fulves' "Gemini Twins" from More Self-Working Card Tricks (1984). In all versions with which I am familiar, the spectators deal through the deck in order to find the mates of playing cards, or to match a prediction, or to find the four Aces. The effect has no emotional resonance because it's about the cards, not the people. In this staging, a couple is invited to face each other, to look into each other's eyes and to discover the precise moment when synchronicity, or intuition, or some deep, soulful connection allows them to miraculously discover each other's selected cards. The ensuing level of astonishment is as deep as it is gratifying.

Procedure & Presentation

"True Romance" plays well for any two people, but it plays best when there is an existing emotional connection between the participants: husband and wife, parent and child, siblings or, my personal favorite, a romantic couple. That's what we'll imagine here.

Amy is seated to your left and Alex to your right.

"Amy, do you prefer the Ace of Hearts or the Ace of Diamonds? And what about you, Alex? The Ace of Clubs or the Ace of Spades?"

Give each their preferred Ace, Amy taking the Heart and Alex the Spade [**Photo 1**]. We now get them fully invested in the goings-on.



“It would be best if you two do everything. Would you please shuffle the cards?”

Split the deck and have the couple shuffle away. Explain that what we are about to attempt has the greatest chance of success when the participants have a special connection between them (*“I’m guessing that you guys have such a connection. Am I right?”*), and that you are often amazed by the uncanny rapport some couples have.

End the shuffling and have the superior shuffler combine the packets with one final shuffle, entwining the couple’s handiwork. (When it makes sense, you might also explain the notion of 52 factorial,¹² and the fact that the deck, as shuffled by Alex and Amy, is now in an arrangement that has never existed in *any* deck at *any* time since the dawn of the universe. It is, you explain, a unique artifact in a unique arrangement, unique to these two people at this particular moment in time. And far be it from the performer to change that condition.)

Retrieve the deck and hold it in the left hand in preparation for a peek control.

“Amy, I don’t want to disturb the order of the cards by having you remove one. Instead, I’m going to riffle down the deck like this and I want

12. By multiplying 52 X 51 X 50 and so on through the entire deck, you arrive at the number of possible arrangements of fifty-two cards. This is said to be a number far larger than the number of grains of sand on the planet. According to Wikipedia 50 factorial = 3.041409320×10⁶⁴. I have not done the last two calculations to account for a full deck.

you to tell me when to stop. Please remember the card. And, Andy, would you do the same thing? Tell me when to stop.”

Time your riffle so that Amy’s selection comes from the lower half of the deck. Catch a little-finger break below it as you riffle off the remaining cards. Repeat with Alex, timing the riffle so that his selection comes from the top half of the deck. After the peek, allow the selection to drop off your finger to the packet below, and catch a ring-finger break above it as you riffle off the remaining cards. You are now holding two breaks [**Photo 2**].

Immediately following the second peek, relax, step back, give the deck a brief in-the-hands cut and place it onto the table between the participants. Or rather, that’s what you appear to do. What you actually do is control the selections to the top and bottom using Edward Marlo’s One-Cut Double Control (OC/DC) from *Hierophant 2*, as follows:

With the deck in left-hand dealing grip (holding two breaks), the right hand takes the deck in end grip, as if to square it. Use the right thumb to locate the uppermost break, and with the right fingers, pivot all of the cards above the break slightly to the right, with the heel of the left hand acting as the pivot point [**Photo 3**].

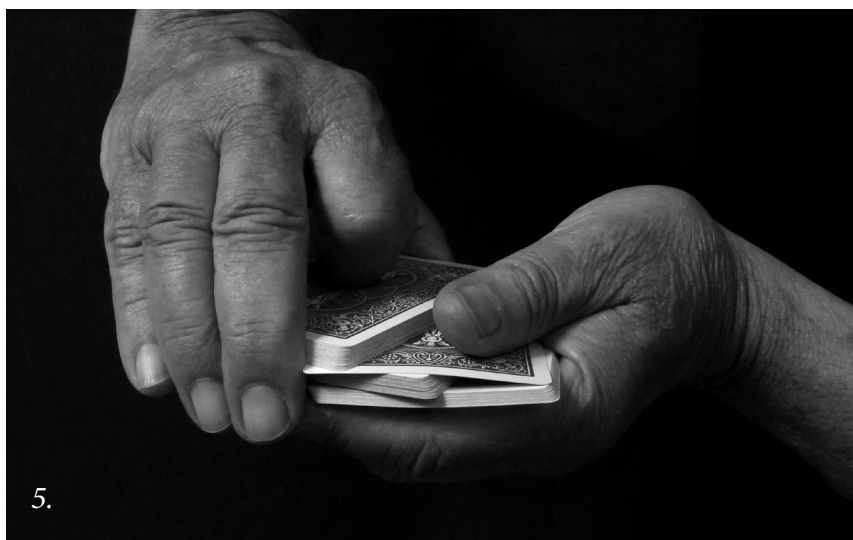
Simultaneously, move your left thumb to the upper left portion of the deck and cover the area of the card that was exposed by the pivot [**Photo 4**].





Now for the apparent cut. Move the left hand to the left, taking with it all of the cards below the little-finger break, as well as the single card under the left thumb, which exerts a downward pressure to drag along the card. This action is similar to a slip cut [Photo 5, next page shows this action in progress].

The right hand, which now holds two packets separated by a break, immediately places its cards beneath the left hand's cards, abandoning the break, and the pack is squared. Done smoothly on the offbeat



with the admonition to *“Remember your cards,”* the sequence takes but a second and looks perfectly innocent. In fact, most of the time it is not even perceived. Table the deck between the couple and step back. Amy’s selection is on the face of the deck; Alex’s is on top.

Some time misdirection is useful here, so ask the happy couple to picture their cards and perhaps to take a deep breath in preparation for what is to follow. Shift your gaze between them, as if trying to puzzle out who should go first. It will be Amy. Ask her to pick up the deck and to hold it as if she were about to deal a game of cards.

“Alex, I want you to focus your attention on Amy. Look into those beautiful eyes of hers. And Amy, I’d like you to begin dealing cards, face down, one by one, into a single pile. And as you deal, I want you to think of your card, but also to look at Alex now and then.”

After six or seven cards have been dealt, turn to Alex.

“Alex, at some point you’re going to tell Amy to stop dealing. You can do it now, or halfway through the deck, or whenever you feel the moment is right. You’ll know when. Just do it before Amy runs out of cards.”

The more cards dealt, the greater the suspense. Usually, the participant will stop before half the deck is dealt.

“Here? You’re sure? Alex, take your Ace and put it face up right there (on the tabled packet). And Amy, put the rest of the deck on top.”

Amy’s selection is now on top of Alex’s Ace of Spades. Gently ribbon-spread the deck in a way that makes it obvious that you are not manipulating anything.

“Alex, I don’t want to belabor the obvious, but isn’t it true that if you had stopped earlier, your Ace would be down here somewhere? And had you waited longer, it would have ended up somewhere up here?”

Don’t neglect this selling point. By literally pointing to specific locations where the Ace *might* have been replaced, the participants are encouraged to visualize a completely different scenario—one that seems just as likely as the current one [Photo 6]. Close the spread and invite Alex to pick up the deck.

“Your turn. Amy, look Alex in the eyes. Alex, begin dealing your cards one by one. Take your time and think of your card as you do. Amy, you’ll know the moment. Whenever you feel it, say stop. Right here? Put your Ace right there. Alex, put the rest of the deck on top. Square everything up.”

Pause for a moment of reflection.

“I never can predict how this will work out. Different people connect in different ways...and sometimes they don’t connect at all. Let’s find out.”



6.

Ribbon-spread the pack, and slide out the Aces and return them to their original owners, along with the cards directly above them. Everyone knows what's coming, but a little delay is nice for added suspense.

“Amy, what card have you been thinking of all along? And Alex, yours?”

Have the happy couple turn over the stopped-at cards, one by one, revealing each other's selections.

Comments & Credits

This is one of those effects that needs no story to elicit an emotional response. It's all in the attitude, the glances, the deep breaths and the interaction of the participants.

I trust you'll find that this routine has more affective power than using the *modus operandi* for a prediction or matching effect. The outcome seems both personal and inexplicable. There is no clue as to when “a method” could possibly have happened, as the participants did everything: the shuffling, the dealing, the stopping, the marking of the location. The only conclusion is that it really *is* the couple's soulful connection that is responsible for the outcome.

Now consider the same effect done with business cards as the markers. What you get is an exceptionally useful routine for networking events in which your role is to facilitate interaction among attendees. You can't get all starry-eyed about the premise, but you can get business cards in play, introduce new acquaintances and boggle a few minds in the process. I should also mention that Jon Allen has a routine in which a couple deal through a deck of “name” cards and end up placing post notes on the cards with their partner's names.

Sometimes (though rarely) the second spectator will deal past the first Ace before being told to stop. This naturally reverses the positions of the relevant cards, so when removing that Ace from the spread, remember to take with it the card *beneath*, not above.

OC/DC is the perfect control for this effect. The peek eliminates the tedium of “*Take a card, remember it, put it back, now you take one,*

look at it, remember it, put it back,” and the mechanics of the shift get you where you want to be instantly, and in position to go any number of ways, as required by the plot. OC/DC is a soft, gentle and neglected sleight¹³. A further application follows.

13. The control can also be used to shift the both peeked selections to the top of the deck. Simply allow each to drop to the packet below, take a break above each, and execute the shift.