

THE TANGO

A SKETCH

BY

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PERSONS OF THE SKETCH

FISCHER, *proprietor of a night café in Paris*

PAUL, *a young man about town*

A LORD, *about to marry JAJA*¹

"NEGRO", *a bully*

JAJA, *the Tango dancer*

MADELINE, *engaged to be married to FISCHER*

LILLE, *in love with "NEGRO"*

Guests, Waiters, etc.

¹ Pronounce Zhá-zha.

THE TANGO

SCENE: *Fischer's Café.* TIME: *Midnight.*

[*A waiter is laying the tables for supper, in a lazy manner, whistling. Enter FISCHER silently, and observes him. The waiter does not see him.*]

FISCHER. Hurry up, you lazy dog. [*The waiter, startled, springs to attention and bustles about.*] I am expecting a lot of big people to-night. Aha! I have a fine new song for them! [*Hums tune of "The Tango."*]

Enter PAUL.

FISCHER. Good-night, Paul, how goes it? Glad you managed to turn up.

PAUL. Madeline will be here in a minute.

FISCHER. Ah, do you envy me?

PAUL. Devil a bit. She's a dear, though. I suppose you'll have a crowd of Americans to-night?

FISCHER. Yes; I've got a new song.

PAUL. Queer lot, those Americans. Lord, but it's dull here without the Tango. That *was* dancing, if you like! She was an American, wasn't she?

FISCHER. Half-French.

[*Enter PIERETTE with three young men; they sit and take up the menu, attended on by the waiter.*

PIERETTE is drug-drunk, and acts unseemly. Enter MADELINE, runs to FISCHER, and kisses him.

MADELINE. Who's half-French?

FISCHER. Jaja.

MADELINE. Oh, the Tango girl? Half-devil and half-child, by my reckoning.

FISCHER. Well, she's reformed now. Going to take up the White Man's Burden!

MADELINE. So she's really caught that millionaire lord after all. Whew! I'm sick of millionaires. Any one can have mine.

PAUL. But not his money.

MADELINE. Bah! Now we've got all we want for the Café. What do you think money means to us women when we love?

PAUL. Yes, when you do love But when do you love anything but money?

MADELINE. Perhaps you think we can't love. Why, it's the only thing we live for.

FISCHER. And if women must have money, it's only to look their best—to hold their love the longer.

MADELINE. And to give it to their love.

FISCHER. You saw how Negro threw Jaja over the minute Lillie turned up in a Poiret frock!

PAUL. Well, Jaja never cared for anything but dancing.

MADELINE. And Negro.

PAUL. Perhaps.

MADELINE. I suppose you think she's only marrying this fool lord out of pique.

FISCHER. Anyhow, she's got money enough. The idiot is trying to buy Paris for her! They're to be married tomorrow.

PAUL. Ass!

FISCHER. He thinks her an angel who has side-slipped.

PAUL. Ho! ho! ho!

FISCHER. And believes that she'll give up the life here for Mrs. Grundy's drawing-room!

PAUL. Poor fool! It can't be done; I've tried it. Once you come here it's for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, till death do us part.

MADELINE. You don't understand what love can do.

PAUL. Oh, love!

MADELINE. Perhaps it's true that after having loved one of us there is no other love.

FISCHER. Absolutely. Marry or die you may, but the soul clings to the old love.

[*During this conversation the cafe has been filling up with girls and men. Enter LORD and JAJA.*

Some, recognizing her, begin to beat on the tables, and call out welcomes.]

JAJA. I've only come to say good-bye; to-morrow we sail for America.

LORD. She's finished with all this.

FISCHER. One never finishes; it's in the blood.

PAUL. Tell the truth, Jaja; you just couldn't keep away a minute longer.

JAJA [Nervously]. For me, it's finished for ever; I've decided to be a Society Bud!

MADELINE. Ah, but you bloomed here!

JAJA [*Spitefully*]. There are some who have never bloomed.

MADELINE. I, for instance. That's why I have kept my perfume!

PAUL. And what a perfume!

FISCHER. Ladies and gentlemen, I will sing you my new song [*Sings*]¹

"What is money to the bliss
Of the honey of a kiss?
What are rank and fame and fashion
To the ecstasy of passion?
Chorus.

Give me dancing!
Give me wine!
Bright eyes glancing—
Yours in mine!
Kisses sucking
Up my breath—
Give me passion!
Give me death!

Were the town of Paris mine,
Its renown should drown in wine
I would pay the land of France
For a day and night of dance.
Chorus

Dreams entrancing float above
Music, dancing, wine and love.
Sober sinks the sobbing breath;
Smiles the sphinx of sleep and death."
Chorus.

[*All applaud vigorously. LORD begins a conversation with FISHER.*]

JAJA. Bravo! [*To Madeline, aside.*] Has *he* been here?

MADELINE. Who, Negro? [JAJA *nods.*] He's coming; he's trying to teach Lillie to dance the Tango in your place.

JAJA. No one can ever take my place.

MADELINE. So you're really going to marry the young English millionaire?

JAJA. Yes; to-morrow morning.

MADELINE. You're not happy, dear.

¹ This song, music by Bernard F. Page, is sold by Wieland and Co. Price 1s. 6s.

JAJA. Oh yes, I am. Once I get into the new life—
MADELINE. You will begin to weary for the old. You will come back to us.
JAJA. Never; it's finished, I tell you.
FISCHER [*To Lord*]. But—one never marries this sort of a woman!
PAUL. As if there was any other sort of a woman!
LORD. Ah, you don't know her real self; she's an angel who fell by accident.
PAUL. Did she fall or was she pushed?
FISCHER. I know them all; it's always by accident.
PAUL. [*Singing*]—

“Give me passion!
Give me death!”

LORD. But she's not French.
PAUL. Ah, you have the English idea of the French. But that's not nearly as bad as the French idea of the English!
LORD. Well, I'm gambling on her. I am sure my love will keep her straight.
FISCHER. What's rank or fortune after a love among us? There's nothing else; all other love is pale and sick.
PAUL. Don't you know the difference between old brandy and ginger-pop?
LORD. Oh, that's all over. She doesn't love *him* any more.
FISCHER. I tell you it's never over, never!
JAJA. What are you men talking about?
FISCHER. Love.
JAJA. Oh, talk of anything else! Bring some more wine!
[*She dabs her face with rouge and powder, and reddens her lips.*]
MADELINE [*To Lord*]. So it's marriage?
LORD. Yes; this is the last night of the old life.
MADELINE. Take good care of her! It's not often one gets away from here.
FISCHER. Shall I marry you, Madeline?
MADELINE. You're mine, silly! What more?
FISCHER. You see!
PAUL. When you've saved enough, you'll marry and do the fine folk from Paris in your chateau!
[*FISHER and MADELINE shrug their shoulders. Enter NEGRO and LILLIE.*]
MADELINE. Hullo, Lillie! Have you learned the Tango yet?
[*LILLIE makes a gesture of disgust.*]
PAUL. Cruel! If you understood how we all love it.
NEGRO. She loves only her Negro, and nothing else on earth.
[*She puts her arms round NEGRO'S neck. PAUL whistles like a railway train, running round the room with his head between his hands.*]
MADELINE [*To Negro*]. Jaja is here; she is going to be married to-morrow; that's her best young man; and aren't we going to be good—I don't think!
NEGRO. Silly cow! I don't care a pink wart if she's here or in Timbuktu.
LILLIE. Oh, do let us go, dear! Where you like; only do let's get out of here. I've got a headache.
PAUL. And I've got cold feet!
NEGRO. Rot; you've got to dance the Tango.
[*LILLIE points to JAJA, and makes a face.*]
NEGRO. That was not real love, anyhow; I've forgotten it, and you'd better forget it too! The other was nothing.
MADELINE. Lillie wishes she had been that nothing.
NEGRO. Women are never content.
JAJA. More wine, waiter! Come and drink farewell, Madeline! Here's the dear old life! Fischer, sing “The Tango” again!

LORD. No; please come away, my darling; you're getting excited.

JAJA [*impudently*]. And for why? Because?

LORD. You're not yourself. I don't understand you. [*He takes her by the arm to lead her away.*]

PAUL [*Sings*]—

“They talk a lot o' loving
But what do they understand?”

JAJA [*Shaking LORD off.*] Let me be! You promised me this one night, and it's mine!

LORD. A man forgives the past, but never the future.

PAUL. When you're as old as I am you'll know that the past is the future.

JAJA. Oh, hang it! No moralizing to-night! Let's drink!

[*FISCHER sings.*]

JAJA [*to Pianist*]. So you no longer play the Tango now that I am not here to dance. [*She jumps on a table and waves her glass.*] The Tango!

ALL. We are all true to you. [*All rise and clink glasses and drink.*]

JAJA. And I to you! In heart, I'm always here, always, always! How the blood aches! How the heart leaps for joy! What other life is so gay, so entrancing? The reek of the smoke is sweeter than all the flowers of the earth and the incense of heaven.

PAUL. Yes! but what price Patchouli?

LORD. [*At table below JAJA, looking up, and consequently very ridiculous*]. I beg of you to come away. You no longer know what you are saying. If you are to bear my name you cannot talk so.

JAJA. This night is mine, mine, mine, mine. Fill my glass! . . . So the Tango is dead. Oh, how I'd love to dance it just once more!

ALL. Bravo! Come, Negro, the Tango!

NEGRO [*To Pianist*]. The Tango! [*He moves towards JAJA from old habit; LILLIE rushes to him and smacks his face, and makes him lead her out. They dance.*] Don't be so nervous. [*She trips.*] If you make another mistake I'll kill you; dance for your life! [*He strikes her. She winces.*] Damn you! You're not doing your best.

JAJA. [*Jumps off table, and tries to drag LORD into the dance.*] Come, come, come, dance!

LORD. I cannot.

JAJA. Oh yes, you can! I'll drag you round all right.

NEGRO [*To LILLIE*]. Do you hear? Dance, I tell you.

JAJA. [*Mocking LILLIE.*] I hate her; I hate her.

[*LILLIE trips. NEGRO throws her aside to the ground as JAJA, throwing her glass down, cries: "Then I'll dance alone," and begins. NEGRO joins her in the dance; as he clasps her she cries: "Give me passion." All have jumped on tables to watch the dance, except LILLIE, who is stunned by her fall and LORD, who wrings his hands piteously, and makes little feeble attempts to rush in and drag JAJA away. Finally he gives it up, and throwing JAJA'S gloves on the table, walks out. LILLIE picks herself up, takes a knife, and flings herself on JAJA and stabs her. JAJA falls as NEGRO catches her, throwing LILLIE aside with his free arm.*]

JAJA. O God! I am dying. Negrito, Negrito, my own, you have at last saved me from the hell of boredom and respectability. Give me your lips! Kiss me Good-bye!

[*She dies in his arms. LILLIE picks herself up, and tries to flee, but FISCHER catches her.*]

FISCHER. One moment, if you please! [*Every one stands spell bound with horror, except PAUL, who walks to the front of the stage, and lights a cigarette.*]

PAUL. Never dull at Fischer's!

CURTAIN.