



Marina Palmer

Kiss and Tango
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At the end of *Kiss & Tango*, you departed Argentina and its political unrest for Athens, Greece. What ultimately brought you back to Buenos Aires?

It would be truer to say that I FLED Buenos Aires! Yes, I abandoned ship in part because of the collapse of the economy which was so devastating that NOBODY at the time believed that the country would ever pick itself back up again, let alone recover as quickly as it did. But let's be honest, the main thing from which I was running was my shattered dream of finding an ideal partner. And I remember thinking, as I took off for Athens that day, that I would never return, which goes to show how well I knew myself! Of course, looking back on it now, it was inevitable that I would return. I had to process my experience first and writing, as it turns out, was my way of doing that. After the book had spewed out of me like a volcanic eruption, and having gained the kind of perspective that only comes with time and distance, I realized that it was time to confront the tango once more. What I didn't know, as I boarded the plane from Athens back to Buenos Aires on 2nd December 2003, was

that I would fall head over heels back in love with the city... and here I still am!

You write openly of your family's disapproval of your initial decision to move to Buenos Aires and learn tango. How did the publication of *Kiss & Tango* change their feelings about your efforts?

At first, it is true that neither my mother nor my father were happy with my decision to pursue the tango as a career. Though I do show in the book how they both gradually come to terms with it, and even grow to appreciate the tango by the end. For example, when my mother films me dancing at La Glorieta on a visit down here and I realize that she "gets it". And when my father tells me that he's proud of me after watching the video I had produced. But there is no denying that the publication of the book was what finally convinced them that their daughter was not completely and utterly nuts! Seriously, I think that sometimes the role of parents is to put up barriers of resistance. It's natural that they should worry about you especially when you are embarking on a path of which they have no understanding. I think that ultimately this resistance should be seen as a test to your commitment: how much do you really want this thing that you are pursuing? At the end of the day, your parents (and all those worry-warts who say "no") are doing their job but that shouldn't stop you. When you do eventually find that thing that makes you tick and you experience some success at it, it will taste all the sweeter if you've had to fight for it. Another one of those laws, I'm afraid to say...

In your opinion, what makes the tango so appealing to people all over the world, starting with the United States?

I think the reason that so many foreigners, and Americans especially, respond so strongly to the tango is that there is a real thirst for physical contact in the increasingly sterile culture of the "developed world." The thing is, Americans want to be embraced just as much as anybody else. They need to touch and to be touched. But try doing that at the office, or at the gym, at your book club, or at the supermarket! In the book, I crack a joke about people being afraid to flirt in New York for fear of being sued. Sadly, it's hardly a joke. Life in the States (and in many other countries) is marked by a distinct chilliness when it comes to human contact. Touching is taboo. And I believe that many people, though they may not be aware of it, are suffering deep-down from this lack of contact. This, in my opinion, is the number one reason that so many people become hooked on the tango from the first time they melt into the soothing embrace of a stranger. Until that very moment, they didn't know how much they had missed it. Try it and you'll see what I mean.

How often do you go to *milongas* these days, and do you still dance with any of your old partners?

I wish the answer were "very often" but that would be a lie. I have a good reason, though: I am dating a wonderful guy who is perfect in every way except that he doesn't dance the tango. Most of my old tango partners would argue that this makes him far from perfect, but what do they know?! In all seriousness, and as I go to great lengths to show in the book, I personally found it difficult, not to say impossible, to reconcile a healthy, harmonious relationship with the tango. I've said this once and I'll say it again: tango spells T-R-O-U-B-L-E. And so, after more than my fair share of it, I am quite happy these days to focus on L-O-V-E. That, in a nutshell, is my excuse for not going to the milonga: I hope you agree, it's a good one.

What recommendations do you have for readers who want to learn how to tango?

I'm very pleased that interest in tango is growing all over the world. My hope is that it changes other people's lives the way it has changed mine. Or if all they want is a new hobby, that's cool too! If you live in a metropolitan area, you will certainly have a large selection of schools and teachers to choose from. And even if you live in a smaller town, chances are that you live within driving distance of a tango community. They're sprouting up like mushrooms all over the place. If you want to know where to start looking, how about Googling the name of your town (or the closest larger town) next to the word tango? You'll be surprised at all the tango being danced under your very nose! And one final word: the tango is easier than you think. Just relax and close your eyes (if you're a woman) and the rest will be a piece of cake. If you're a man, you're about to become a leader in the real sense of the word. Talk about a transferable skill...