

# OPERA LIBRETTO

Original Story and Libretto by **Tiziana DellaRovere**

## Tango of the White Gardenia

A Tango-Infused Chamber Opera in Two Acts



Music by Ethan Gans-Morse

*Commissioned by Cascadia Concert Opera*

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# TANGO OF THE WHITE GARDENIA

## A Tango-Inspired Chamber Opera in Two Acts

Libretto by Tiziana DellaRovere

Music by Ethan Gans-Morse

### Theme

The central theme of the story that unfolds in this opera is about how true, enduring love is more precious than winning external recognition and climbing the social ladder. The secondary theme, interwoven throughout the story, is how the consequences of parents' mistakes befall their children, specifically how the abandonment and absence of the mother creates insecurities and a sense of not being worthy of love, and the absence of the father creates in his daughter a compulsion to seduce, and a ferocious competitiveness to make it in the world and be recognized at any cost.

### Genre

The story unfolds against the background of Argentine Tango, which, in this context, becomes a metaphor for life and a perfect canvas for the expression of intense passion, deep connections, strident conflicts, and powerful reconciliation. I envision the opera in the genre of *Opera Buffa*, but with an undertone of serious themes and characters.

### Roles

The opera has six main characters. The two older characters, Anthony and Sofía (who appears onstage as a memory and an ethereal presence), are the tango teachers and represent the voice of wisdom, experience, and enduring love. The dramatic narrative of the story revolves around the four younger (20-something-year-old) tango students: Sandra, Victor, JoJo, and Justin. They've all known each other for a long time, having grown up in the same quaint, small town on the coast of Northern California. Some of the physical attributes described in these characters are of course flexible for the singers. The libretto makes reference to a panel of judges in the final sequence of the opera. These characters could appear onstage as supernumeraries or simply remain an implied presence offstage.

#### **ANTHONY (Tenor)**

A master teacher of tango in his late 50's-60's. He represents the archetype of the classical *milonguero* whose whole life has centered around the dance and culture of tango. He is elegant and debonair, and he considers it his mission in life to preserve and transmit the classical rules of the dance and the deep spirit that is embodied in

the uncontaminated soulful essence of the original salon style of tango. He's a wise, caring father figure to all of his students. He's the voice of wisdom and deep understanding of life. He attributes all his skill and life knowledge to his teacher, Sofía, a world-renowned Tango dancer and teacher from Argentina who accepted him as her dance partner. Together they traveled the world, dancing and teaching, and eventually became lovers even though Anthony was 25 years younger. Sofía was, and still remains, the great love of his life, and his love for her endures passionately beyond her death.

### **SOFIA (Mezzo Soprano)**

Sofía is the embodiment of the mysterious, profound, feminine soul of tango. At the time the opera takes place, she has been dead for 20 years, but she appears onstage as a memory, a spirit, and an inspiration. She died when she was in her 70's and Anthony was in his late 40's. Her soul is in constant contact with Anthony, who is deeply devoted to her memory. She embodies a combination of everlasting love, indomitable strength, exotic beauty, and deep, exquisite femininity. Her signature look was to wear red shoes and two white gardenias in her hair when she danced.

### **Sandra (Soprano)**

Sandra is the central protagonist. She's young, early 20's, beautiful, with a voluptuous, womanly body, (*which is not fat despite what JoJo says!*) so she doesn't have that stereotypical slim tango dancer look. At the beginning of the opera, she's insecure, naive, and starry-eyed. She wants to please others and be accepted by imitating all those whom she admires. She doesn't know who she really is and what she wants, so she's susceptible to being bullied and hurt. She's enthusiastic about tango because, in her sensitive soul, she deeply feels the passion of the dance and she resonates with the sentiments that the music expresses. But at the beginning, her single intent is to be a better dancer in order not to disappoint her boyfriend, Victor. Her painful wound, which thwarts her sense of self, is that her mother left when she was four and never returned, so she was raised by a single father. Her arc through the story is to find her own self, express her true nature, become empowered, and stand up to the competitive jealousy of her adversary, JoJo, and her demanding, narcissistic, and critical boyfriend, Victor. This internal transformation will allow her to eventually find true love.

### **Victor (Baritone)**

The macho, self-absorbed, self-inflated partner of Sandra. He's domineering and critical. He always has to be on top of the pack and he needs to win and be admired. He's very handsome and he knows it. He's the one that all the girls pant after and

want to be with, but he's loyal only to himself. He's over the top and two-dimensional like the old *commedia dell'arte* to lend humor to the *opera buffa* dimension of the opera. Victor starts out as Sandra's boyfriend, counting on her admiration and willingness to please him, and this magnifies Sandra's own insecurities. Eventually, he will betray her by dumping her for her rival, JoJo, who is his dramatic counterpart, in order to win the competition.

### JoJo (Mezzo Soprano)

The antagonist, the bad girl. JoJo is the worst kind of stereotype of modern tango dancers. In her mid-late 20's, about 6 years older than Sandra, she's ultra-slim with long legs, perfect body, very image conscious. In her daily life, she's a yoga teacher and personal trainer. Her pain is that she was abandoned by her father when she was 10. As a result, her family's social status was reduced, leaving the family to struggle to get by and preserve their reputation. JoJo has deep, unresolved anger and need for male attention and a single-minded compulsion for victory and recognition. She's aggressive, ambitious, competitive, and compulsively seductive. She's a bully who has no compunction about resorting to cheating. She is cruel, the very antithesis of Sandra. Her resentment toward Sandra is deeper than even what appears on the surface, as she holds a secret revealed later in the opera that explains her hostility and gives her a dimension of vulnerability. Her character has an arc because through the opera, she learns that cheating is not worth the price, and eventually she finds a measure of redemption. JoJo's persona is over the top, like Victor, but more three-dimensional. Nevertheless, she is material for *Opera Buffa*-style comedy much of the time.

### Justin (Tenor)

Justin is the nice, sensitive guy, capable of love. He comes from an upper-class, wealthy family which holds political clout in their small town. He is the peacemaker, the one who wants to make things right and rectify injustices. He starts out as the ill-matched partner and boyfriend of JoJo, who considers him a catch due to his higher social status but nevertheless takes any opportunity to bulldoze over him. He treasures connection and deep, soulful interactions. He eventually rebels against JoJo's dishonesty and out-of-control ambition, and stands up for himself and what he considers honest and just.

## Setting

The opera takes place in present time a small town in northern California. Nearly every scene is set in Anthony's dance studio except the milonga and the dance competition. One effective way to set the dance studio would be to have framed panels that evoke the mirrored walls of a studio.

This opera employs the use of dancing doubles for each of the six characters, as well as unchoreographed supernumerary dancers if possible in the milonga and competition scenes. It is of paramount importance that the whole body of the dancers be visible when they dance, especially the feet because the upper body is basically static in tango dancing and the beauty of the dance is seen in the legs and the feet. This could be achieved by elevating them on a platform or in any other way according to the needs of the director's vision. Some of the dances throughout the opera happen while the singers sing, others only accompanied by the music.

The framed panels would allow the dancers to "mirror" the singers, then step through the "mirrors" and "tag" the singers, signaling to the audience that the dancer is now playing that character while the singer freezes or recedes through the "mirror." Ideally the dancers physically match their singing doubles as much as reasonably possible, but to further clarify that the singers and their corresponding dancers each represent the same character, the singers should be dressed in very distinct colors from each other, while each of their dancing doubles should be dressed with the same color as their singing double.

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## ACT I

### 1a. PRELUDE (Instrumental) {Dancers}

*Sofía and Anthony's dancing doubles enter and perform a brief dance.*

### SCENE 1: THE LONGING (Anthony, Sofía)

*In his studio, Anthony kneels in front of a large portrait of Sofía and places a bouquet of flowers on a little shrine below the portrait which he's created to memorialize her. In the portrait, she wears a white gardenia in her hair. Anthony wears a matching gardenia on his lapel.*

#### ANTHONY

You came to me with a veil over your face  
and your soul on fire.  
I lifted the veil,  
I found my heart beating in yours.  
You took me, you danced life into me,  
And I became a man.  
I miss you! Time moves slowly without you.  
Sofía, I miss you, my love.

*Sofía enters as an ethereal presence behind Anthony, slowly, hypnotically advancing toward him but remaining always behind him. He can't hear her, he can't see her, but she can see and hear him.*

*Their dancing doubles enter in a twilight but remain on the sides of the stage, keeping the focus on the singers. For a brief moment, they dance, representing Anthony and Sofía's memories of their youth.*

I see you in the twilight,  
Your red shoes fastened around your ankles,  
Caressing the floor like a painter's brush,  
Delicate strokes trace the edges of my soul.  
Now that you're gone,  
You're more alive than ever, alive inside of me.

*The dancers retreat into the darkness. Sofía is now very close, almost touching Anthony from behind, caressing the air around him like a lover while he remains oblivious of her presence.*

#### ANTHONY

I hear your words.

#### SOFIA

I speak in your dreams.

**ANTHONY**

I feel your long hair brushing my face.

**SOFIA**

Like the murmur of a spring breeze.

**ANTHONY**

I touch your neck, so smooth and soft.

**SOFIA**

I long for your kisses.

**ANTHONY**

I smell the scent of white gardenias on your skin.

**SOFIA**

My love is without end.

**ANTHONY**

Sofía, dance with me one more time.

**SOFIA**

Antonio, I dance in your heart forever.

**ANTHONY**

In your Embrace, I find myself.

**SOFIA**

In your Embrace, I find love.

**ANTHONY**

You taught me Tango, you taught me life.

**SOFIA**

I taught you Tango, I taught you life.

**ANTHONY & SOFIA**

You are my life.

SCENE 2: REMEMBERING DOÑA SOFÍA (Sandra, Anthony) {No Dancers}

*Sandra bursts onstage, buoyant, with her dancing shoes over her shoulder, ready for her lesson, nervous about being late.*

**SANDRA**

I'm here. I'm late! Sorry, sorry. Where is everybody?  
Oh. I'm the first one here.

*She becomes aware of Anthony, her tango teacher, standing, contemplating the portrait of Sofia. She moves slowly toward him, joining him in front of the portrait.*

Doña Sofía. She was so beautiful!

**ANTHONY**

Beautiful and strong. A legend in her own time in Buenos Aires and around the world.  
And when you danced with her, it felt like you'd died and gone to heaven.  
When she looked at you, you felt she could see your soul.  
And when she taught you to tango, she knew you better than you knew yourself.  
She fought, and oh how she could fight,  
To bring you out of your fears,  
To live and die dancing the spirit of Tango.

**SANDRA**

Do you miss her?

**ANTHONY**

Every day, every hour, every breath.

**SANDRA**

How long ago did she die?

**ANTHONY**

20 years ago.

**SANDRA**

She died young!

**ANTHONY**

No, she was much older than I.  
But she was ageless.

**SANDRA**

In her picture,  
I can't tell how old she was,  
Or where she came from...

**ANTHONY**

She came from Buenos Aires.

She gave me Argentina,  
She took me in her home.  
We danced all over the world.

She was always there, present, ready to live and die,  
dancing the spirit of tango!

**SANDRA**

Maestro Anthony,  
I want to be like Doña Sofía,  
I want to learn to live and die,  
Dancing the spirit of Tango!  
Can you teach me, can you?

**ANTHONY**

*He turns her toward him for emphasis and looks her in the eye.*

I can teach you the steps.  
But the spirit of tango...  
The spirit of tango can only be born in your heart.

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**SCENE 3: The Competition (Anthony, Sandra, Victor, JoJo, Justin)**

{No Dancers}

*Victor enters the studio, boisterous, followed by JoJo and Justin. Victor acts like the cock of the walk, bantering with and jostling the other students before focusing all his attention on Sandra.*

**VICTOR**

Did you know, my little Sweet Pea,  
In this little town of ours,  
Where we all grew up together,  
Our little town,  
Quiet and picturesque,  
Lulled by the waves of the ocean,  
Surrounded by the tall redwood forest,  
Did you know, did you know, did you know  
This little town of ours,  
Silent like a cemetery,  
Is about to burst  
Into the most fabulous tango festival!  
With tango teachers...

**JOJO, JUSTIN, SANDRA**

Tango teachers...

**VICTOR (echoed by others)**

With tango dancers,  
From all over the world,  
Here, in this little town of ours,  
All for us!

**JOJO, JUSTIN, SANDRA (addressing Anthony)**

When?!

**VICTOR**

In six months.

**JOJO, JUSTIN, SANDRA**

Is it true?

**ANTHONY**

Yes, it's true.

It was supposed to be a secret, but...

**VICTOR**

Ha ha ha!

I have my ways.

Nobody can keep a secret from Victor!

*(to the audience) That's me!*

But wait there's more!

**JOJO, JUSTIN, SANDRA**

What?! More?!

**VICTOR**

A competition!

A tango competition!

**JOJO, JUSTIN, SANDRA**

A competition!?

Here, in this little town of ours?!

**VICTOR**

And the winners go to the national championship in San Francisco.

**JOJO, JUSTIN, SANDRA**

And the winners go to the national championship in San Francisco.

**SANDRA** *(pacing nervously)*

A competition?!

How come I never knew about this competition?

**JOJO, JUSTIN, SANDRA** *(to Anthony)*

Did you know about this competition?

**ANTHONY**

No, tango is not competition,

Tango is feelings, *sentimientos*...

This is the first I've heard about a competition.

This festival is not a competition. *(Anthony exits, frustrated)*

**VICTOR**

Yes, it is!

The Board has announced it!

Sandra, it's decided. I've decided.

Did you know, my little Sweet Pea?

You are going to train very hard, and we are going to win.

*Sandra looks terrified.*

**JOJO**

*Grabbing Justin by his collar and dragging him toward Victor with a defiant look.  
A ferocious, toothy grin on her face*

Not a chance, because we're competing too

And we are going to win. Right, Justin?

**JUSTIN** *(freeing himself from her clutches)*

Yes, JoJo, I'll try my best.

**JOJO**

Try your best?!

We never try, Justin! We win! I always win!

Justin, it's decided I've decided!

You are going to train very hard, and we are going to win.

**VICTOR**

Ha ha ha!

Dream on, I will win!

**JOJO**

You dream on, I will win!

**VICTOR**

I'm the best, I will win!

**JOJO**

No, I've danced longer!

**VICTOR**

But I know all the tricks, little girl.

**JOJO**

I am a yoga instructor,  
I am a personal trainer.  
You don't have a chance!

**VICTOR**

I'm gonna win!

**JOJO**

You don't have a chance!

**BOTH**

I'm gonna win!

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**SCENE 4a: THE TANGO LESSON (Anthony, Sandra, Justin, Victor, JoJo)**

{Dancers}

*The students all begin changing from street shoes into their dance shoes. Throughout the scene, their dancing doubles exchange places with the singers demonstrate the action of the dance lesson. In larger venues, dancing supernumeraries could be added here to represent additional students, according to the vision of the director.*

**ANTHONY** (*Shaking his head in exasperation*)

*Basta!* Enough!

No more winning and losing,

You know the routine.

As always, we start with the walk.

*The students make sounds of exasperation*

Each day, each lesson, starts the same,

Even advanced dancers,

Yes, the very best dancers, practice their walk.

*He demonstrates the basic walking of tango. JoJo pairs with Justin, Victor with Sandra. Throughout this part of the scene, one possible way to stage it would be to pair up the singers and then have the dancing doubles stand behind each corresponding singer and move them like a marionette into the correct position.*

Followers, find your axis.

Just because you follow, doesn't mean you're made of Jello.

Don't be passive. Be active.

You're in charge of expressing the rhythm of the music,

And shaping each of your leader's movements.

*Anthony approaches Sandra, who looks concave and collapsed.*

Sandra, don't collapse.

Every time you dance, you must hold your power.

**SANDRA**

But how?

**ANTHONY**

Plant your feet on the ground,

Feel your core, find your center.

Meet him with your strength.

*Anthony corrects Sandra's posture. Sandra tries, but Victor is too forceful and rough.*

**ANTHONY**

Victor, feel your partner.  
Just because you're leading doesn't mean you run her over.  
Never force her.  
You must always connect with her.  
Instead of pushing with your arms,  
You lead her always with your chest, like this.

*He presses on his own chest with his fist. Anthony turns to JoJo, who's forcing Justin around the floor while adding all kinds of overly dramatic embellishments with her feet.*

JoJo, and who is leading here?  
What is this, a wrestling match?  
Justin, you're the leader,  
JoJo, learn to follow.  
You must learn to follow his lead.

*Anthony is exasperated.*

Stop, stop!  
Stop and listen to me.  
Everyone stop and listen to me!

Feel the flow,  
Breathe in, breathe out.  
Tango is like life,  
Feel the flow,  
Give, receive.  
Tango is like life.  
Leading is like a gust of wind.  
Firm, but gentle.  
Following is like the branches of a tree,  
Flexible, but strong.

Doña Sofía used to say:  
To be a good leader, you must learn to follow,  
To be a good follower, you must learn to lead.

Very well. Victor, Justin, dance together.

**VICTOR**

With him? No way, I don't dance with guys.

**ANTHONY** *(very authoritative, ignoring Victor)*

Justin leads, Victor follows.

**VICTOR**

What?!

**JUSTIN**

What?!

**ANTHONY** *(with an intense look)*

Do you want to stay?

*Victor, resigned, walks toward Justin.*

**ANTHONY**

JoJo, Sandra, dance together.

**JOJO**

With her? No way!

**ANTHONY**

Sandra leads, JoJo follows.

**JOJO**

Sandra's clueless! She can't do it.

**ANTHONY** *(same intense look)*

Do you want to stay or go?

*JoJo walks toward Sandra with a disgusted look. They pair off and then the singers freeze or retreat and the dancers dance, first tentative, then as a beautiful choreography of male-male and female-female dancing. The music takes over. When the music concludes, the singers unfreeze/return.*

**ANTHONY**

Very good.

The lesson's over.

I'll see you all at the dance tonight.

*(SPOKEN)* Remember, in Argentina, they call these dances "Milongas."

**INSTRUMENTAL INTERLUDE (4b):** *The singers and dancers leave the stage. Anthony places the white gardenia from his lapel in front of Doña Sofía's portrait with reverence. Dancing doubles move the mirror frames as they leave to create the open space of a dance hall.*

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**SCENE 5: THE MILONGA (Anthony, Sandra, Victor) {Dancers}**

*Dancers enter first (including additional supernumeraries of various skills levels; they need not be choreographed). Perhaps they aid in the scene change. Then they take up a scene position with the women sitting at one table and the men checking them out from the other side of the room.*

*Anthony enters and contemplates the scene. Sandra enters with Victor, and Victor encourages her to join Anthony, which she does with enthusiasm, leaving Victor behind on that side of the stage. Soon after, JoJo and Justin enter, and JoJo begins to lavish attention on Victor, leaving Justin aside.*

**SANDRA**

Maestro, I'm so happy to see you.

**ANTHONY**

Sandra, I'm so glad you came.

Dancing at a milonga is the best way to learn.

Every dance has something to teach you, no matter if you're dancing with a student or the best dancer in the world.

**SANDRA**

When I go to a milonga, I'm afraid no one there will ask me to dance.

**ANTHONY**

Sandra, you were like a rosebud,

But now you're a splendid flower!

When women in Buenos Aires accept an invitation to dance.

They say Yes with their eyes.

Sandra, say Yes with your eyes.

Doña Sofía used to say:

"Begin your dance with your eyes,"

Like it's done in Buenos Aires.

*As Anthony instructs Sandra (and Justin), all the men and women in the room copy them, so each of Sandra and Justin's movements are magnified by the spectacle of all the male dancers doubling Justin and all the female dancers doubling Sandra. During this time, JoJo and Victor freeze off to one side so as to put all the focus onto Justin and Sandra.*

He looks at you and you look back.  
And you smile.  
Not with your mouth,  
But with your eyes.  
Then wait,  
No rush.  
Let him come to you.

**JUSTIN** *(As if time and space have stopped. Everyone freezes but Justin, who is entranced with Sandra)*

Like a gentle flower blooms  
Through the cracks of a stone,  
The sight of you quakes the walls of my heart  
And I feel...  
Something beautiful.

**ANTHONY** *(Anthony resumes. Sandra, Justin, etc. resume enacting his words)*

And then he comes to you,  
Standing in front of you.  
And you meet  
On the dance floor,  
And you feel...  
Then wait,  
No rush,  
Ready for his embrace.

**SANDRA** *(as if time and space have stopped, all other frozen, looking at Justin)*

Like a strong flower  
Blooms through the cracks of a stone,  
The sight of you quakes the walls of my heart  
And I feel...  
I feel beautiful.

**ANTHONY** *(once again everyone unfreezes and Anthony resumes)*

And then you close your eyes,  
Lean into the embrace.  
Two bodies becoming one.  
Only then,  
You both take the first step.  
Only, it's not him or you taking the first step.  
It's the tango, dancing through you.

**SANDRA AND JUSTIN** *(All others freeze. Showing a highly charged connection which is passionate and filled with deep feeling, Sandra and Justin are lost in an eternal moment...)*

Come into my embrace,  
Dance with me,  
Hold me close and dance,  
Dance where there is no time,  
Only the forever of love.  
*They're about to touch...*

**JOJO** *(JoJo interrupts right then, grabbing Justin away while still dragging Victor behind her. She addresses Justin.)*

Hey! Come along honey!  
Time to dance with me.  
Time to dance together.  
Time for us ALL to dance together  
*To Sandra with open hostility*  
Except you, what do you think you're doing?!

*On the dance floor, the dancer representing JoJo dances with both Victor and Justin simultaneously. All other dancers (supers) dance in the background. Sandra is completely excluded. At a certain point, Victor comes back to Sandra. The dancers continue in the background, including JoJo and Justin's doubles.*

**VICTOR** *(to Sandra)*

Wow! JoJo's a great dancer!  
If you dance like her, I'm sure we could win. *(Anthony exits in disgust)*  
Maestro, can you teach her to be as good as JoJo? *(Looking around for Anthony)*  
Maestro? Where'd he go?

*Victor resumes dancing (via his double), and the scene ends with JoJo, Victor, and Justin dancing frenetically in front with the supers in the background, while Sandra is alone, feeling utterly confused and abandoned.*

**SCENE 6: IF ONLY I WOULD... (Sandra) {No Dancers}**

*As the dancers leave the milonga, they carry off the furniture and reset the studio. In the dance studio, alone, waits for Anthony for a private lesson, Sandra (the singer, not the dancer) practices boleos, pivots, pretends to do sentadas, saltos, etc, in front of a mirror, all awkwardly imitating JoJo with mixed success. Sandra now has a ponytail like JoJo's (or something obviously imitating JoJo's hair and style).*

**SANDRA**

Will you ever want me?  
Will you ever like me?  
Maybe, maybe,  
If only I would,  
If only I could...  
Will you ever want me,  
Will you ever like me?  
Maybe, maybe,  
If only I would,  
If only I could...  
Maybe I could be how you want me to be.

I feel like a leaf falling to the ground.  
Where will I land?  
I'm sinking down through rough waters  
Where I cannot breathe,  
And I'm cold and lost.  
I don't know what I want.  
I don't know who I am.  
Why can't I be like you want me to be?  
Will you ever look at me like you look at her?

Would you ever want me?  
Could you ever like me?  
Then maybe,  
You'd never have left me?

Mother, Mother, Mother,  
Why did you leave me?  
Why didn't you stay with me?  
Why did you leave me, Mother?

Will I ever find you?  
Will I ever see you again?  
If only I would

If only I could  
Maybe I could be what you want me to be

Then maybe, maybe  
You wouldn't have left me...

Will you ever find me  
Will you ever see me?  
Will you ever love me?  
If ever you would  
If you ever could.

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SCENE 7: THE PRIVATE LESSON (Anthony, Sandra, Sofía) {No dancers}

*Anthony enters, watches Sandra for a moment.*

**ANTHONY**

Hello, Sandra,  
Are you ready for your private lesson?

**SANDRA**

Yes, I want you to teach me some fancy steps,  
Something dramatic, difficult, impressive!  
Teach me something breathtaking,  
Teach me something daring,  
*Calesitas, Enrosques, Doble frentes, Colgadas,*  
Backward *ochos, Ganchos sentados,*  
Teach me the fanciest steps you know!

**ANTHONY**

And why such a sudden passion for fancy steps?

**SANDRA**

It's Victor.  
Victor wants to enter the competition.

**ANTHONY**

Yes, I know,  
But do *you* want to enter the competition?

**SANDRA**

I have to.  
No! I *want* to.  
I mean, I *must*!  
Well, I don't know really.  
I'm afraid I'll disappoint him.  
I'm afraid I won't be able to win.  
And then he'll be so mad at me.

**ANTHONY**

Dear girl,  
You're trying too hard.

**SANDRA**

I want to make him proud of me.

**ANTHONY**

But are you proud of him?

**SANDRA** *(ignoring the question)*

I want to make him happy to dance with me.

**ANTHONY**

Are you happy to dance with him?

**SANDRA** *(more frantically)*

It's decided, I've decided!

I must enter the competition.

I need to find the perfect costume,

The perfect dress,

The perfect shoes.

**ANTHONY**

Sandra, tango is not about showing off.

**SANDRA:**

I need to be as good as JoJo,

No! *(spoken)*

Better than JoJo!

Teach me *Ganchos* and Pivots, *Saltos*, *Sentadas*!

I want him to toss me,

Twirl me,

Dip me and sweep me away!

*Anthony takes her hand in his to stop her frantichness and calm her down.*

**ANTHONY**

Sandra,

I see strength in you, and courage,

Even if you don't know it yet.

I will help you.

The spirit of Doña Sofía will help you.

Your lesson starts now.

Listen well: *(Taking Sandra's hand and placing it on her heart)*

Quiet, present, now.  
Not in the future,  
Not in the past,  
Quiet, present, now.  
The beating of your heart.  
Listen.

*(Sandra echoes him as he continues. Sofía vocalizes from out of sight/offstage.)*

Sofía always said,  
“First, enter the temple of your heart  
Like a sacred sanctuary,  
With devotion, respect, and humility.  
Then wait until the spirit of the Tango  
Sweeps you away.  
And then, only then, do you move your feet.  
Only then can two move as one.  
Only then do you live and die,  
Dancing the spirit of Tango.”

*Doña Sofía is revealed behind Sandra, as if empowering her.*

**SANDRA, SOFÍA, ANTHONY**

Quiet, present, now.  
Not the future,  
Not the past,  
Quiet, present, now.  
The beating of your heart.  
Quiet, present, now.

*Anthony recedes (or exits in a smooth, unobtrusive way).*

---

SCENE 8: BLESSING (Sofía) {Dancers}

*The dancer representing Sofía begins a short, soulful dance, alone, fueled with longing and pathos.*

**SOFIA**

Sandra, it's not in the vastness of the sky,  
Nor the depths of the sea,  
Sandra, it's not in the heights of the mountain peaks,  
That you find yourself.

Sandra, don't travel far away,  
Don't search above and below.  
The treasure is within you.

*Sofia's dancer resumes, and this time she "summons" Sandra's dancer as if evoking Sandra's dancing spirit out of her. Sandra (the singer) is left frozen onstage. The two women dance together, and in a stylized way, Sandra's double is seen learning from Sofia's double.*

*Sofia (the singer) returns, replaces her dancing double, and resumes singing, while Sandra's double remains onstage. As Sofia sings to her, Sandra's dancing double responds to the words through her dance.*

Sandra, don't fear the passion of your heart.  
Let it burn like smoldering amber.  
Let it warm your soul and fuel your dance.

Sandra, don't travel far away,  
Don't search above and below.  
Your tango is in your heart.

*Sofia and Sandra's dancing double leave.*

---

SCENE 9: FAT GIRLS DON'T WIN (Sandra, JoJo, Justin) {No Dancers}

*Anthony is taking a break between lessons. Sandra is alone in the studio. JoJo and Justin arrive for their own private lesson. Sandra is about to leave. JoJo sees Sandra wearing a ponytail like hers, sees Sandra clearly imitating her, sees Sandra clearing admiring her, and scoffs at her.*

**SANDRA**

Oh, JoJo, you're next.  
I was just about to leave.  
I just finished my lesson. (*Approaching JoJo with admiration*)  
JoJo, I love your shoes,  
Golden and sparkly,  
Are they new?

**JOJO**

No, they're not,  
They're mine  
I don't remember where I got them,  
So don't ask.

**SANDRA**

I wasn't asking...  
I wasn't trying...  
I didn't mean to...

**JOJO** (*coming uncomfortably close to Sandra*)

Oh look at your hair, a ponytail!  
Just like mine.

*She swipes at Sandra's ponytail in disdain, then tosses her own with pride*

**SANDRA** (*apologetic*)

It looked so good on you,  
I wanted to try it myself.

**JOJO**

Copy cat!  
Stop trying to be like me.  
It's pathetic.

*JoJo gets in Sandra's face. Justin grabs JoJo's arm to pull her back.*

You're never going to make it to the finals.

**JUSTIN**

JoJo, leave her alone.

*Jo-Jo frees herself from his grip, becomes even more vicious. She circles around Sandra, hands on her hips, sizing her up critically.*

**JOJO**

Too bad

**SANDRA**

What?

**JOJO**

*(spoken)* Too bad you've always been so fat!

*Music changes, taking on the character of a comical villain.*

You're fat,  
You're fat,  
Fat girls don't win.  
No, no, no, fat girls don't win.

Butterball, round and round,  
Legs too plump to jump,  
Too short to reach,  
Too pudgy to twirl,  
No, no, no, fat girls don't win.

*JoJo (the singer) moves menacingly around Sandra, showing off her own dance moves to emphasize her superiority.*

Your thighs touch  
Your arms flap  
Your belly folds roll  
You're fat  
Fat girls don't win  
No, no, no, fat girls don't win

*JoJo stops, then moves closer to Sandra, and with a condescending smile, lifts Sandra's chin up.*

At least you have a pretty face!

But you're never gonna make it to the finals.

You're already roadkill!

*(Sandra runs away crying, followed by Justin)*

---

SCENE 10: LIFE IS CRUEL, LIFE IS UNFAIR (Sandra, JoJo, Justin) {No Dancers}

*Justin chases after Sandra and catches up with her*

**JUSTIN**

Sandra, you're not fat.

You're beautiful.

**SANDRA**

Then why has she always hated me so much?

I just wanted to be her friend.

**JUSTIN**

I don't know,

All I know is your hair is too beautiful for a ponytail.

*He undoes the ribbon that holds the ponytail and her hair cascades down to her shoulders.*

**SANDRA**

I don't know why, but women have always hated me,

Ever since I was a child.

**JUSTIN**

How can that be true?

**SANDRA**

Yes, it's true.

Even my mother didn't want to be my mother,

My own mother.

She left.

I never saw her again.

I was four years old.

I don't even remember what she looked like.

**JUSTIN**

Sandra, I'm so sorry about the past,

But I'll talk to JoJo right now.

I'll try to make this better.

I'll do everything I can to make peace.

*Justin returns to JoJo who is standing nearby angrily*

**JUSTIN**

Why, JoJo?

Tell me why you're so cruel to Sandra?

Where's your heart?

**JOJO**

Life is cruel,

Life is unfair,

You wouldn't get it!

*(Aside to the audience)*

There are the whiners and there are the tough ones.

The whiners are losers,

The tough ones are winners.

Sandra is a whiner.

Sandra is a loser.

*Intense transitional music as she paces, fuming. Perhaps her dancing double enacts a quick solo.*

*(Still as aside to audience)* Where's my heart?

My Heart?! Ha!

You can have your heart, Mr. Silver Spoon,

Son of the Mayor,

Living in a 5,000-square foot house on the hill,

With luxury cars,

And a fancy degree.

You can afford to have a heart.

I buried my heart

When I was 10,

When Papa left,

I fell from the pampered life,

From up on the hill,

Into the hell of the

Railroad District.

I became the man of the family,

I was the one who kept us alive!

I am a fallen angel.  
My wings have been crippled,  
My heart is like old, cracked leather,  
But my mind is sharp like a blade.

*Music changes and JoJo returns to the present moment and addresses Justin, touching him very seductively in an overtly sexual way*

**JUSTIN** *(spoken)*

Come on JoJo, what is it I wouldn't get?

**JOJO**

*(spoken)* That's enough talking, Justin.  
*(sung)* Look, my body is soft and feminine,  
My body is soft and desirable,  
I am a fallen angel.  
You like that. Don't you?

**JUSTIN** *(flustered)*

Oh yes!

**JoJo**

There's so much you don't know about.  
Don't worry, because I can teach you.  
I'm making my way back up the hill.  
And you'll help me, won't you?

**JUSTIN**

Oh yes!

**JOJO**

We have six months to practice.  
We'll practice every day, won't we?

**JUSTIN**

Oh yes!

**JOJO**

Because I am a fallen angel.  
My mind is sharp like a blade.  
And we'll do whatever it takes to win, won't we? Whatever it takes to win.

### **MUSICAL INTERMEZZO**

*Dancers show the passage of time as they practice, stumble, attempt, learn, and finally succeed. Director and choreographer can use this as needed to further the narrative and have some fun with “opera buffa”-style physical humor, particularly showing the rough edges of the relationships within the two couples.*

---

SCENE 11: I CALL FOR YOU (Sofía, Anthony) {No Dancers}

*Night time.*

**SOFIA**

I call for you, Antonio mío,  
Not when the sun is bright,  
Not in the noise of day,  
But when the world is quiet,  
And the earth is wrapped in restful darkness.

**ANTHONY**

Tonight, the moon is hiding from the stars,  
Like you, Sofía, hiding from me.  
I search the darkest darkness of the sky,  
Where the stars are brilliant,  
That's where I find you.  
When the earth is wrapped in restful darkness.

**SOFIA**

I'm so close.  
Hear my whispers,  
The whispers that only your soul can hear.

**ANTHONY**

The loss that never stops aching  
Brings back the memories of years gone by,  
Sweet like the fragrance of night blossoms.

**SOFIA**

I never abandoned you.  
I'm always with you.

**ANTHONY**

I never abandoned you.  
I'm always with you.

**SOFIA AND ANTHONY**

I never abandoned you.

I'm always with you.

*For a moment, Anthony senses her presence.*

**ANTHONY**

A breath of your perfume  
Vanishes just as I want more,  
Leaving me longing for your white gardenias.

**SOFIA**

Look, the town is festive  
With dancers, musicians, and singers,  
Be at peace, Antonio, my love,  
Be at peace, Antonio, my love.

**ANTHONY**

Ah, Sofia,  
This competition brings out the very worst in my students.

**SOFIA**

There is a world beyond this world,  
Without competition, without comparisons,  
Only acceptance, benevolence, and joy.  
It's the world of the Embrace.  
Teach your students the ecstasy of the Embrace,  
Teach them that paradise is hidden within them  
In the sweetness of two hearts melting,  
Dancing the spirit of Tango.

**ANTHONY**

I never wanted this competition.  
It brings out the worst in my students.  
The worst, the worst.

---

SCENE 12: I WANT OUT (JoJo) {No Dancers}

*Just as Anthony finishes singing, JoJo is seen tampering with the heel of one of her golden shoes that Sandra liked so much. At first, she tries to twist the heel, then she hits it or maybe uses a little shoe hammer and wedge to take the heel off and then put it back together in a fragile way. The idea is to demonstrate her sabotage in a way that is clear to the audience. This whole scene is done with such furious rage that it appears that she's going out of her mind.*

**JOJO**

Here are the shoes you liked so much, Sandra.

You little wimpy, whimpering whiner,

Goody-two-shoes.

I want you out of my life,

Out, out, out of my life!

I want out of missing you, Papa,

I want out of taking care of you, Mama,

I want out of this town, *(banging the shoe against something in time with the music)*

I want out of this town,

Get me out of this small little town

Where I'm a small little trainer

In a small little studio

Teaching yoga to fat old ladies.

I wasn't meant to be a trainer.

I was meant to be a star.

I'm going to San Francisco,

I'm going to the National Championship,

I'm going to win and travel the world,

And you're not going to stand in my way, Sandra,

You little wimpy, whimpering whiner,

Goody-two-shoes.

Here you go, Sandra,

The maestro's little pet,

Victor's little "Sweet Pea,"

I want to see you dance

In these golden, sparkling shoes of mine.

---

**SCENE 13: WHERE ARE YOUR SHOES? (Sandra, Victor, JoJo, Justin)**

{Dancers possibly as pantomime}

*It's the Qualifying Round of the Competition. Sandra, JoJo, and Justin are preparing to go out onto the dance floor and compete to enter the Final Round of the competition two days later. The whole scene develops into total pandemonium in a "buffa" style. Victor is late as usual. Sandra is perfecting her makeup and checking her outfit. She takes out the bag that contains her dance shoes. Like most dancers, she carries her shoes in a cloth bag with a drawstring at the top. Just as she is about to open the bag, she sees Victor, sets the bag down, and runs to greet him. While Sandra is distracted, JoJo opens the bag and steals one of Sandra's shoes.*

**SANDRA**

Oh Victor,  
I was afraid you wouldn't make it on time!

**VICTOR**

Of course I wouldn't miss it for the world.  
This is the qualifying round, Sandra.  
It's important.

Look, I'm ready but you're not.  
Where are your shoes, Sandra?

**SANDRA**

I was just putting them on...

*Sandra goes back to where she left her bag. She opens it and to her horror, finds that one of the shoes is missing.*

Oh God! Oh God! Oh God!  
There's only one shoe here.  
Where has the other one gone?

**EVERYONE**

There's only one shoe here!  
Where's the other one?

**SANDRA**

It was here in the bag, and now it's gone!

**VICTOR**

That's impossible.  
Think harder.  
Where's your other shoe?

**EVERYONE**

Where's your other shoe? (3x)

**SANDRA**

I don't know,  
Everybody look,  
Did it fall out? (3x)

*Pandemonium ensues as everybody looks for the shoe. Several times, somebody comes close to find where JoJo has hidden it, and each time, JoJo gets there first and moves it. This repeats several times. The staging is so tight in this sequence that it's almost a choreographed dance. This sequence could also involve the dancing doubles and the supers for added effect.*

**VICTOR**

You're such a spaced-out twit, dreamy-head girl,  
I'll bet you left your shoe at home.

**EVERYONE**

Oh no! You left your shoe at home?!

**SANDRA**

No I didn't! (3x)

**VICTOR**

We just lost the competition before it even started.  
It's all your fault.  
I'll never forgive you.

**EVERYONE**

They're about to start.  
Where's your other shoe?  
Where's your shoe?

**JOJO**

Hey Victor,

Don't be so hard on her.  
Of course, anyone can have a moment of stupidity.

So, Sandra, look!  
Here are my sparkling shoes,  
The golden ones you liked so much.  
My gift to you,  
A good luck charm.  
Try them on, they're yours!

**SANDRA**

Oh JoJo,  
You saved me!  
Thank you!  
*(Sandra tries them)*  
They fit perfectly! *(Hugging her)*

What would I do without you? (3x)

**EVERYONE**

We're up next! Let's dance!  
We're on now! Let's dance!

**SANDRA**

Let's dance! (3x)

**EVERYONE**

Let's dance!

---

**SCENE 14: THE PRELIMINARIES (VICTOR, SANDRA) {Dancers}**

*The dancers take the floor all at once in front of the judges, matched by their dancing doubles. If possible, the judges should be supernumeraries. As Sandra and Victor begin to dance, it becomes clear that Sandra is wobbling badly. Then she does a dramatic step and the heel breaks off. Sandra stumbles and Victor catches her. Sandra continues to dance without putting any weight on the heel.*

*Victor and Sandra, sotto voce, as they dance:*

**VICTOR**

What the hell is happening?

**SANDRA**

The heel just broke off my shoe!

**VICTOR**

Jesus, Sandra!

Can't you do anything right?

**SANDRA**

Keep going.

I'll dance on my toes.

**VICTOR**

But without the fancy steps we practiced,

How will we make it to the finals?

**SANDRA**

Just follow the music.

Dance in the spirit of Tango.

*They rebalance themselves and then continue to dance but without any fancy steps. It's obvious to everyone something is wrong and they gasp when Sandra first stumbles. At the discretion of the director/choreographer, Sofía might appear as a silent, empowering presence in the background. When the dance is over, the judges consult each other animatedly. Anthony approaches the judges, then returns to the dancers.*

**ANTHONY**

The judges will now confer.

JoJo and Justin,  
Congratulations, you made it through!  
*JoJo is beaming, Justin is somber. SUSPENSE....*

**ANTHONY**

Victor and Sandra,  
You're going to the finals as well.  
*JoJo looks furious*

**SANDRA**

We did it, we did it.  
I did it!  
Shoe or no shoe.  
Tell me, what did the judges say?

**ANTHONY**

The judges were impressed with your musicality and your courage.  
They thought if you could dance so well on broken shoes,  
Then maybe you both deserve a chance.

**JOJO**

In other words, they felt sorry for you.

**VICTOR** (*proudly patting Sandra*)

My Sweet Pea is so lucky.

**SANDRA**

Victor, I'm not your sweet pea.  
Don't ever call me Sweet Pea again!  
I'm not yours,  
And I'm not sweet,  
And I don't feel lucky right now.  
*Sandra walks away.*

---

SCENE 15a: THE TOAST (JoJo, Victor) {No dancers}

**VICTOR**

What's with her?

**JOJO**

Don't bother trying to understand her.

She's always complaining about something.

But I'm in the mood to celebrate.

Look what I have!

*JoJo opens a bottle of champagne and offers Victor a glass. They both toast and drink throughout the scene and get more than a bit tipsy.*

And I don't mind if you call me, "Sweet Pea."

*Whatever kind of physicality she used to seduce Justin in Scene 10, she does exactly the same thing here on Victor but it doesn't have the same effect because Victor is too narcissistic to notice. Instead, he turns it around and takes control by acting out his own self-importance in a ridiculous way.*

**VICTOR**

Oh no, you're not a sweet pea.

You're more like red hot chile pepper.

**JOJO** *(smiling coquettishly)*

A chile pepper?

**VICTOR**

You're like one of those sleek purple eggplants,

**JOJO**

An eggplant?!

I think you've got the wrong emoji!

**VICTOR**

Long, smooth, and mysterious.

Legs that never end.

**JOJO**

Ah, my long, smooth, and mysterious legs.

**VICTOR** *(pleased with himself, ignoring her throughout)*

You're like a macadamia nut,  
Tasty and sweet, and gluten free.  
You're a string of seaweed,  
Swaying in the sea.

*JoJo undulates*

A stinging nettle.

**JOJO**

A what?! A stinging nettle?

**VICTOR**

Baby, you can sting me any time.  
I don't mind.  
It's good for my immune system.

*JoJo laughs and then grabs him ferociously.*

**JOJO**

I'll be your stinging nettle  
If you'll dance with me!

**VICTOR**

Oh I'll dance with you alright! *(He tries to grab her to dance. She easily evades him.)*

**JOJO**

I meant in the competition!

**VICTOR**

Of course.

**JOJO**

When we dance together, everybody stares at us.

**VICTOR**

I love how good you make me look.  
They just can't keep their eyes off me...  
...And you!

**JOJO** *(raising her glass to toast)*

To us, the winning couple!

**VICTOR**

To San Francisco and Buenos Aires!

**JOJO**

But what about Justin?

**VICTOR**

And what about Sandra?

**BOTH**

Let's dump them both!

*Victor and JoJo move, arm in arm, back to where Anthony is still talking to Sandra and Justin. JoJo addresses Justin, Victor addresses Sandra.*

**JOJO**

Hey Justin, I'm sorry to say, but we're not a match.

**VICTOR**

Hey Sandra, I'm sorry to say, but we're not a match.

**JOJO AND VICTOR** *(holding each other more tightly)*

Who's a good match?

We're a good match.

Too bad it didn't work out.

Now we are partners for the finals.

Too bad it didn't work out.

Ta-Ta!

*They leave Justin and Sandra in shock*

SCENE 15b: I can't believe it (Justin, Anthony) {No dancers}

*Justin and Sandra are shocked.*

**JUSTIN**

What the heck was that? I can't believe it.

*(to Anthony)* Can they do that?

**ANTHONY**

Yes, the qualifying round evaluates you as individuals.

There's still time to register for the finals as a couple.

*(aside to audience)*

This competition is bringing out the worst in my students.

The worst, the worst...

*He leaves.*

---

SCENE 16: IT'S NOT FAIR (Justin, Sandra) {No Dancers}

**SANDRA** (*angry*)

It's happening again.  
My mother abandoned me,  
Now Victor and JoJo,  
It's like a curse that follows me everywhere.

**JUSTIN**

It's not fair.  
We practiced for six months because *she* had to win.  
And now she dumps me?

**SANDRA** (*sad and hurt*)

Yes, I thought she was my friend.

**JUSTIN**

So did I!  
I never knew she was capable of this.

**SANDRA**

My shoe, her shoe, the shoe!  
*Sudden realization. Sandra inspects the shoe that JoJo gave her.*  
Look Justin, she tampered with this shoe.  
It was all a ploy all along.

**JUSTIN**

I've always rescued whenever she was in trouble.  
But this time, she crossed the line.  
This time, I won't let her get away with it.  
This time, I'm putting my foot down.  
Give me the shoe.  
I have to do the right thing.  
I have to let the judges know.

*Justin tries to take the shoe from Sandra.*

**SANDRA**

No. (*She pulls the shoe back*)  
I have to do the right thing.

SCENE 17: THE FIGHT (Sandra, JoJo, Justin, Victor, Anthony) {No Dancers}

*Sandra walks toward JoJo aggressively, holding the shoe, shaking it in front of JoJo's face.*

**SANDRA**

You did this.  
You set me up.

**JOJO**

Get your stinky shoe out of my face.

**SANDRA**

Why do you hate me so much?

*JoJo tries to get away but Sandra blocks her.*

**JOJO**

Hey, move!

**SANDRA**

Not until you tell me why you hate me so much.

**JOJO**

Move, move, move!

*JoJo begins to push and attack Sandra physically*

**SANDRA**

Take your hands off me

**JOJO**

Get the hell out of my way, you slut!

**SANDRA**

So I'm the slut?  
You seduce my boyfriend,  
You steal my partner,  
But I'm the slut?

*JoJo is like a trapped animal, punching Sandra, but Sandra grabs her hands, forces her to the floor, pinning her hands above her head. Victor makes a perfunctory attempt to intervene, but Justin prevents it.*

**VICTOR** (*trying to intervene halfheartedly*)

Hey, cut it out!  
I need her for the Finals.

**JUSTIN** (*stopping Victor forcefully*)  
Leave Sandra alone.

**SANDRA**  
You called me “fat, fat, fat, fat,”  
But “Fat girls *do* win!”  
Yes, I weigh more than you. That’s my advantage!  
Now tell me why you hate me so much.

**JOJO**  
You’re the daughter of a slut.  
Do you know why my father left?  
Because your mother seduced him  
And took him away.  
That’s why I hate you!

*Sandra, shocked, releases her and both get up, disheveled, exhausted.*

**SANDRA**  
My mother ran away with your father?

**JOJO**  
Yes, and they went who-knows-where together.  
I lost my family,  
We lost our house,  
And we lost all of our money.  
My mother went crazy,  
She’s been sick ever since.  
And who do you think takes care of her?  
Me, me, me,  
That’s right, it’s all on me,  
Trapped here in this stinky little town.  
Your mother destroyed my life.  
That’s why I hate you.  
Yes, I did it, I did it!  
I cut the heel off your shoe,  
Just to make you fall.  
I wanted you out of my life,  
Now get out of my life forever.

*JoJo leaves abruptly, pushing through Sandra, who is in shock*

Get away from me!

*Victor runs after her, imploring her.*

**VICTOR**

JoJo, are you ok?

Can you still dance?

Are we still going to win?

*They exit. Sandra is distraught and calls for Anthony.*

*(Anthony could be offstage implying some kind of office).*

**SANDRA** (spoken)

Maestro Anthony...

I need to talk to you.

My mother ran away

with JoJo's father.

That's why I've been

alone all my life.

**ANTHONY**

The mistakes of the parents

Fall on the children's shoulders.

If only they would,

If only they could,

Would they rewrite the past?

**SANDRA**

Nobody ever told me the truth.

My mother chose another man and abandoned me.

**ANTHONY**

Does she regret it now?

If ever she would,

If ever she could,

Would she choose you over him?

The mistakes of your mother fall on your shoulders.

Be strong.

Be brave.

Be who you're truly meant to be,

The one who lives and dies,

Dancing the spirit of Tango.

*Anthony takes the white gardenia from his lapel and places it in Sandra's hair.  
Sandra wipes away her tears and stands straight and determined.*

**SANDRA**

I'm not going to let JoJo keep me out of the competition.  
Justin, we still have two days left. Will you be my partner, please?

*Justin takes her hands and holds her in a way that shows he accepts.*

SCENE 18: IN THE SPIRIT OF TANGO (Justin, Sandra) {With Dancers}

*Sandra and Justin enter the studio to practice.*

**JUSTIN**

Will you miss him?

Will you miss Victor?

**SANDRA**

No, he's right.

We're not a match.

I wanted him to like me so much,

I forgot to ask myself if I liked him.

**JUSTIN**

How much *do* you like him?

**SANDRA**

He's handsome alright,

But no,

I never liked how he treated me.

With him, I always felt alone.

**JUSTIN**

I was always taking care of her.

**SANDRA**

Will you miss her?

What did you like about JoJo?

**JUSTIN**

She's sexy alright,

But that's not a very good reason to be with her.

The truth is I always felt alone,

The whole time I was with JoJo,

All my life, until I met you.

**SANDRA**

We only have 36 hours.

**JUSTIN**

We need to memorize steps.

**SANDRA AND JUSTIN**

Let's start practicing!

**SANDRA**

We have to get used to each other.

**JUSTIN**

We need to balance our weight.

**SANDRA AND JUSTIN**

And plan some fancy steps.

Otherwise, Victor and JoJo will win.

*Their dancing doubles start dancing awkwardly, trying difficult, dramatic steps, but the whole thing looks unwieldy and forced. Then they stop. As the singers sing, the dancers enact in parallel what they're singing with a dance that is tender, intimate, languid, and passionate.*

**SANDRA**

Stop, stop, stop!

No, if we continue like this, we're surely going to lose.

I'm not JoJo.

**JUSTIN**

And I'm sure not Victor.

**SANDRA**

I want to be myself.

Let's dance like we're in Buenos Aires,

In the tradition of the *milongueros*.

**JUSTIN**

At the *Confitería Ideal* tango salon,

**SANDRA**

I sit at the cloth-covered table, under the dim light of the chandeliers.

**JUSTIN**

By tall Corinthian columns,

I see all the beautiful women,

And I choose you,

And I call for you with my eyes.

**SANDRA**

And my eyes smile back,  
You walk toward me...

**SANDRA AND JUSTIN**

...And we find our embrace.

**SANDRA**

My cheek on your cheek.

**JUSTIN**

My heart on your heart.

**SANDRA AND JUSTIN**

Come into my embrace,  
Hold me close and dance (4x)  
Dance where there is no time,  
Only the forever of love.  
Tango is a conversation without words  
Where we find the embrace we've always longed for.

**SANDRA**

My cheek on your cheek.

**JUSTIN**

My heart on your heart.  
My movement is smooth and sensual.

**SANDRA**

My eyes are closed in total trust.

**JUSTIN AND SANDRA**

This beautiful anguish in our hearts,  
Lingering on the song  
Of *bandoneón* and violin,  
The sweet ache of desire fulfilled,  
Of invisible tears flowing,  
Of moments of ecstasy,

Which we can never capture again.

**SANDRA**

The body is quiet

**JUSTIN**

The contact relieves the loneliness.

**SANDRA AND JUSTIN**

We're no longer alone.

Together, we enter the temple of our hearts

Like a sacred sanctuary,

With devotion, respect, and humility.

Together, the spirit of tango sweeps us away.

And then, only then, do we move our feet.

Only then do we move as one.

Together, we live and die

Dancing the spirit of tango.

*The singers recede, replaced by their dancing doubles. Tender, passionate music continues as the dancing doubles dance a romantic tango.*

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**SCENE 19: THE GRAND FINALE (Sandra, Anthony, Justin, Victor, JoJo)**  
{With Dancers}

*The final round of the competition is underway. The dancers are preparing for the Grand Finale. Anthony takes aside Sandra, Justin, JoJo, and Victor. Optionally, supernumerary dancers could be in this scene dancing or warming up.*

**ANTHONY**

This is the final round of the competition.  
I've taught you well  
Because Doña Sofía taught me well.  
You're all great dancers.  
In my eyes, and in my heart,  
You've already won.  
Go, dance,  
Dance with abandon  
And show us that the spirit of tango lives on.

*The competition begins. Sandra and Justin dance mostly in close embrace, with a sense of flow, intimacy and grace, in salon style, demonstrating their great connection, precision of step, and perfect musicality, showing oneness with each other and the music.*

*JoJo and Victor dance magnificently in a very dramatic, external style with awe-inspiring athletics.*

*Supernumerary dancers may optionally dance in the background in a contained space without calling attention to themselves. The men wear numbered tags on their backs. But the dancing doubles of the main characters are in the foreground and alternate as the music shifts between the romantic salon style of Justin and Sandra and the more athletic style of JoJo and Victor. This creates the effect of a dancing duel where each couple responds to the other in turn.*

*When the dance is over, the judges vote and Anthony receives the results to announce to the public and to the dancers.*

And here are the results:  
The runners-up, in second place,  
Couple Number Nine, Sandra and Justin!

*There is applause, and Sandra and Justin kiss as Anthony places a medal around each of their necks.*

And the winner,  
Going on to compete in San Francisco,

Couple Thirteen,  
Victor and JoJo!

*Victor raises his fists in the air in a sign of victory. JoJo jumps up and down, then grabs the trophy from Anthony. There is a comedic tug of war between JoJo and Victor to see who will hold the trophy. One of the judges approaches Anthony and hands him a note, which Anthony reads (the judge could be a supernumerary or this exchange could be implied offstage). One way this could be staged is Justin could be overtly seen passing the note along to the judge.*

One moment:

It appears I've been too hasty.  
Unfortunately, there is a controversy,  
A rumor of impropriety,  
A violation of the rules,  
A breach of ethics!

There has come to the attention of the judges:  
A malicious tampering with a contestant's shoes  
Concocted to eliminate Couple Number Nine  
Justin and Sandra,  
On the part of Couple Number Thirteen,  
JoJo and Victor.

**VICTOR**

I know nothing,  
I'm innocent of any wrongdoing!

*He grabs the trophy from JoJo and clasps it to his chest. JoJo points at Sandra.*

**JOJO**

That witch ratted me out,  
And you, Victor, you just threw me under the bus!

**ANTHONY**

If this is true,  
JoJo and Victor will be disqualified  
And banned from all competition for the next three years.

*Everybody gasps!*

*Anthony takes the trophy back and hands it to Sandra.*

So the first prize, with a trip to compete in San Francisco,  
Goes to Couple Number Nine.  
Sandra, it's up to you,

To tell the truth,  
To confirm the accusation,  
Or dispel it.

*Sandra looks at Victor and Justin, realizes that Justin must have been the one who informed the judges of JoJo's cheating.*

**SANDRA**

The truth, the truth,  
The absolute truth,  
Is my shoe came off,  
In the preliminary dance.

The truth, the truth,  
The absolute truth,  
Is that I have a new dance partner,  
Who's the perfect love for me.

The truth, the truth,  
The absolute truth,  
Is that I found myself,  
And I found love.

The truth, the truth,  
The absolute truth,  
Is that the judges found Couple Thirteen  
To be the winners,  
And JoJo to be the best dancer of all.

*Sandra returns the trophy to JoJo*

The victory is hers,  
The love is mine!

*Sandra walks back to Justin and they hold each other lovingly as they are applauded and congratulated by all.*

**ANTHONY**

The competition's officially over,  
Let the Milonga begin,  
Let the heart dance with abandon!

*As the dancers (supernumeraries?) dance and celebrate in the background, JoJo approaches Sandra alone downstage.*

**JOJO**

Why did you do that?  
Why did you let me win?

**SANDRA**

Because you are a great dancer.  
Because you deserve to follow your dream,  
To compete in San Francisco, to travel the world.

**JOJO**

What about you?

**SANDRA**

I've already found my dream.  
It's in me,  
It is me,  
In this beautiful little town of ours,  
Quiet and picturesque,  
Lulled by the waves of the ocean,  
Surrounded by the tall redwood forest.  
I love and I'm loved,  
Dancing the spirit of tango.

**JOJO**

Sandra,  
Maybe it wasn't your mother who seduced my father after all.  
Maybe it was my father who seduced your mother.

**SANDRA**

We'll never know.  
The truth, the absolute truth,  
Is you didn't need to cheat to win.  
You didn't have to be such a horrible bully  
To be the winner.  
You would have won anyway because you're the best dancer I know.

**JOJO** *(making some kind of display of openness toward Sandra)*

And you're the best person I know.

**SANDRA** (*Shutting JoJo down with a whimsical smile*)

Now, I may be a good person, but I'm not stupid.

In case you're tempted to hurt me or Justin or anyone else again,

Just remember, I have this:

*She takes out her smartphone and replays a clip she recorded of JoJo confessing to the sabotage:*

*"Yes, I did it, I did it!*

*I cut the heel off your shoe,*

*Just enough to make you fall.*

*I wanted you out of my life,*

*Now get out of my life forever.*

*JoJo looks shocked but doesn't have time to respond because Victor, Justin, and Anthony approach JoJo and Sandra.*

**VICTOR** (*taking JoJo's hand and dragging her away dramatically while JoJo cringes*)

Come on, let's dance together,

My Hot Tamale.

Let's show the world how great we are!

*(JoJo makes a disgusted face at "Hot Tamale" but strikes a pose anyway to show that she's the champion of the competition).*

**JUSTIN** (*pulling Sandra to himself tenderly*)

Let's dance, my lovely Sandra.

Let's fill our hearts in sweet Embrace.

**ALL**

Let's dance in the Spirit of Tango,

In the Soul of the Embrace.

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SCENE 20: SOON YOU'LL SEE ME AGAIN (Anthony and Sofia) {No Dancers}

*Anthony has left the milonga and he stands outside in the darkness of the night.*

**ANTHONY**

All is well my love,  
My Sofia,  
All is well.

**SOFIA**

You're growing closer and closer to me,  
Soon we'll be in each other's arms again.  
Dancing in the starry night of the universe.  
Breathing the same air,  
Drinking the same water,  
In a garden of white gardenias.

**ANTHONY**

I know you're here with me,  
Even if I can't touch you,  
Even if I can't see you...

**SOFIA**

I'm always with you

**ANTHONY**

...I feel your love,  
Lingering in the air,  
Like a dream  
That seems so real.  
I feel your love.

**SOFIA**

Soon, soon you will see me, *Antonio mío*.  
Life is eternal.  
Memories never die.

**ANTHONY AND SOFIA**

The spirit of tango has taken root in the hearts of the people,  
Never to be forgotten,

Never to be forgotten.  
The spirit of tango has taken root in the hearts of the people,  
Never to die, never to be forgotten,

**SOFIA**

To live and die  
In the Tango's embrace.

**ANTHONY**

To live and die  
Dancing the spirit of Tango.

**ANTHONY AND SOFIA**

To live and die  
Dancing the spirit of Tango.

*The opera ends with some kind of symbolic gesture with the white gardenia, such as Sofia taking the gardenia from her hair and Anthony taking the gardenia from his lapel, and then the two bring their flowers together and hold them in their clasped hands, or something of that nature, symbolizing their union and their life beyond life.*

END OF OPERA