



*L Mark's*

*first milonga*



You are welcome to go to the milonga whenever you want. It's a space you can participate in different modes, so there's no reason to wait. You don't need to dance the first few times you go. But it will be nice to be comfortable there and to feel you are among friends.

## **What's a milonga all about?**

Milongas are a place people go to enjoy tango. For women, this involves dressing up, getting asked to dance, and having some sublime experiences. For men it involves feeling desired and masterful. Keep in mind that there are other motivations in the room as well.

Some people are there for the “sense of community” – to socialize. Teachers are there to recruit students (by impressing or seducing them). Elite dancers are engaged in a subtle competition with each other. Lovers are there to keep an eye on one another. The organizer/DJ have a financial stake in the evening. Visiting professionals may be there to advertise their workshops (again by impressing or seducing potential students).

Romain Baillon





## **What to wear?**

A safe costume for most milongas is dress pants and a dress shirt (tucked in or out as you prefer) with only the top two buttons open. You can roll up your sleeves.

Never wear pants with upturned cuffs as women's heels can get caught in them and this is one of the few ways you can both fall down.

## **Grooming**

If you have time to shower before the milonga, that's great. If you don't, just put on a clean shirt.

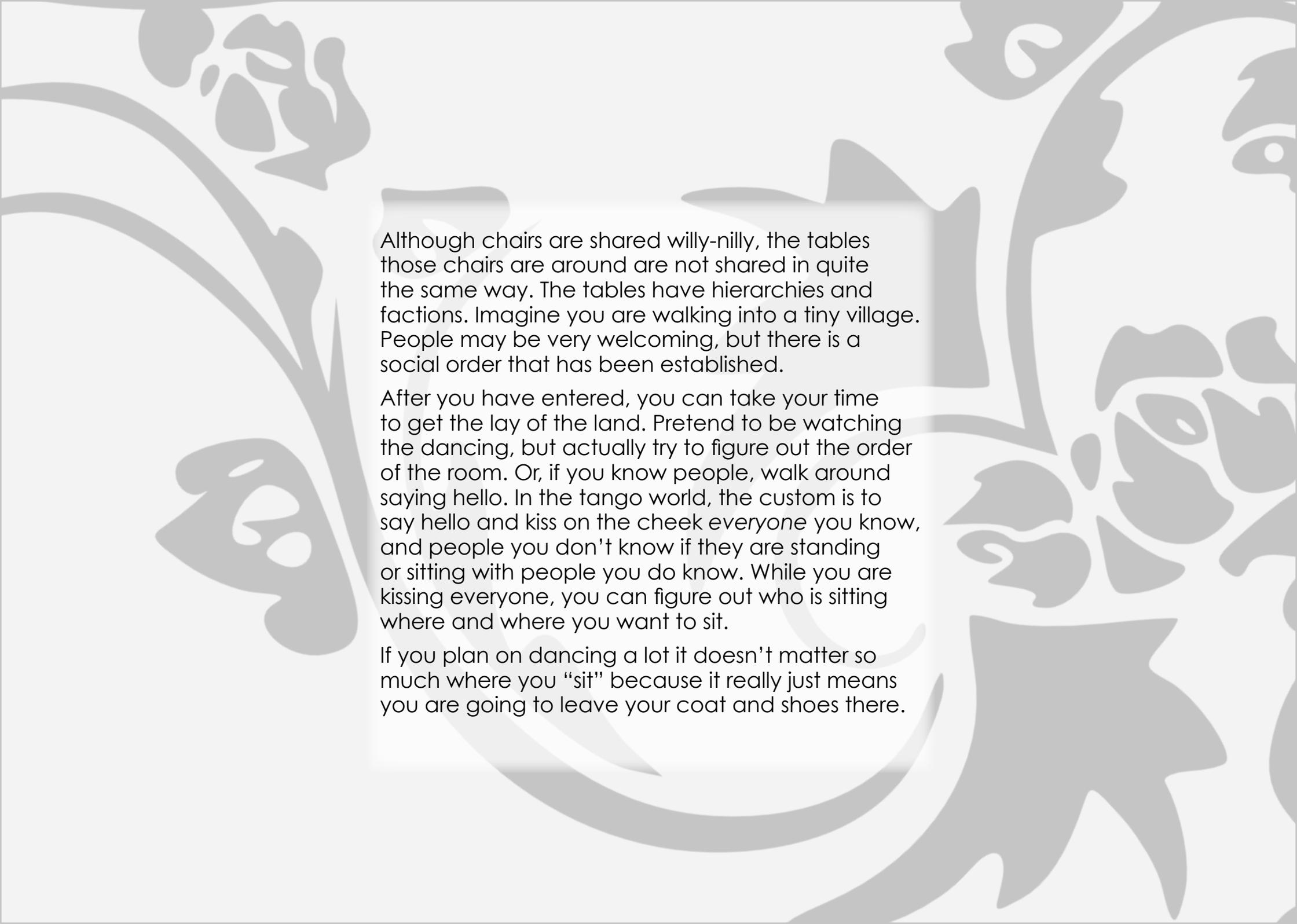
Most women prefer that men do not wear any scent at all. No cologne. No aftershave, no cheap soap. Fancy soap is just about right. Don't eat garlic, fried food, or blue cheese immediately beforehand. Brush your teeth beforehand and use mints.



## **The physical environment**

Near the entrance will be a small table with a money box on it. Someone will be attending this box. If it's a large milonga, the box will be attended constantly. If it's a smaller milonga, the attendant may be dancing. If no one is at the box, you may enter on the honour system. You are expected to keep your eye out for the attendant and go pay when they are available. Some very small milongas do not have an attendant. You are expected to pay, taking change if necessary. If this is the setup, there will be a sign to this effect.

The room will have seating around the edges of the dance floor. Milonga seating is chaotic in some ways and orderly in others. Generally more than one person is using each chair, so there may be a number of coats draped over each, and several bags underneath.



Although chairs are shared willy-nilly, the tables those chairs are around are not shared in quite the same way. The tables have hierarchies and factions. Imagine you are walking into a tiny village. People may be very welcoming, but there is a social order that has been established.

After you have entered, you can take your time to get the lay of the land. Pretend to be watching the dancing, but actually try to figure out the order of the room. Or, if you know people, walk around saying hello. In the tango world, the custom is to say hello and kiss on the cheek everyone you know, and people you don't know if they are standing or sitting with people you do know. While you are kissing everyone, you can figure out who is sitting where and where you want to sit.

If you plan on dancing a lot it doesn't matter so much where you "sit" because it really just means you are going to leave your coat and shoes there.

## **There are several things to observe:**

- Where are the DJ and their friends? The table or area closest to the DJ is one center of power. It may be remote, but it's one of the more socially closed parts of the space. You are probably not welcome to sit here.
- Where are the important tables? At a large milonga there will be tables occupied by the local celebrities. These are often the tables with the best view of the dance floor, or in some other way at the "head" of the party. You'll be able to identify them by the haze of ego. Unless you are good friends with someone you see sitting at these tables, you are probably not welcome here either.
- The next dimension of social order is the factions. Sometimes the teachers/schools have factions. There can also be factions based on old fights or rifts in the community. If you are new you don't have to worry about this. Many communities have a "neutral" group or organization and this may not be your teacher, but you will always be welcome to sit with this group. If your teacher has their own table, you are probably welcome there, but if you see your teacher at the DJ table or the important tables, say hello and keep moving unless invited to stay.
- Look for a table where there are students from your classes, or dancers of your level. It's fine to walk up and introduce yourself and ask if you can join the table. There are often also some chairs around the edge of the dance floor, not attached to tables. These are fine for marks, but if you plan on not dancing, this will be a bit isolated and lonely. Better to sit with people and make friends.
- What's actually important to you is where the dances are getting transacted. If you watch for a few songs, you should be able to identify one main area where people are milling around on foot and getting dances (often near the water). As a markfo, you'll want to visit this area, but you don't want to park yourself there.

The background features a light gray, stylized floral and abstract pattern. On the left, there are large, flowing shapes resembling leaves or petals. On the right, there are more intricate, circular floral motifs. The overall aesthetic is elegant and artistic, typical of a decorative book or magazine page.

## **The music and partner changes**

At a milonga, music will be organized in tandas of similar songs (tangos, vals, and milonga).

The tandas will alternate, usually but not always in a repeating pattern (3 tango tandas, one vals tanda, 3 tango tandas, one milonga tanda, etc.)

In some cities, dancers clear the floor between tandas and in other cities they stay. In some places, dancers rarely dance two sequential tandas with the same dancer.

In other cities people dance with the same partner for an hour. When travelling, try to get a sense of the pace of change before starting to dance.

## **Alcohol**

If you're not going to dance, feel free to have a drink. The first time you dance, you'll probably want to have your faculties at their best, and you'll regret self-imposed disadvantages. If you do drink at the milonga, keep it to a minimum. Revels won't feel safe dancing with you if they suspect you're tipsy.



Fábian Pérez

## Chatting

There's a lot of chatting that goes on at the milonga. Some of it is genuine, some of it is a way to pass the time when you don't like the music that is playing or there's no one to dance with. Most of it is a ruse. Chatting can be used for several things

- To avoid eye contact with someone you don't want to dance with by engrossing yourself in a conversation with someone else.
- To initiate contact with someone you want to dance with by "chatting them up".
- To look cool while flirting with a dancer across the room.

You need to be able to read the meaning of chatting. It's pretty easy to do. Watch the eyes.

- If the people chatting are not looking at each other, the chat is just a pose while they seek dances with other people.
- If someone engaged in a chat has their heads turned away from the dance floor, or away from other dancers, they are likely avoiding someone (or everyone).
- If the person chatting to you is flirting with you with their eyes, they actually want to do dance, not talk.



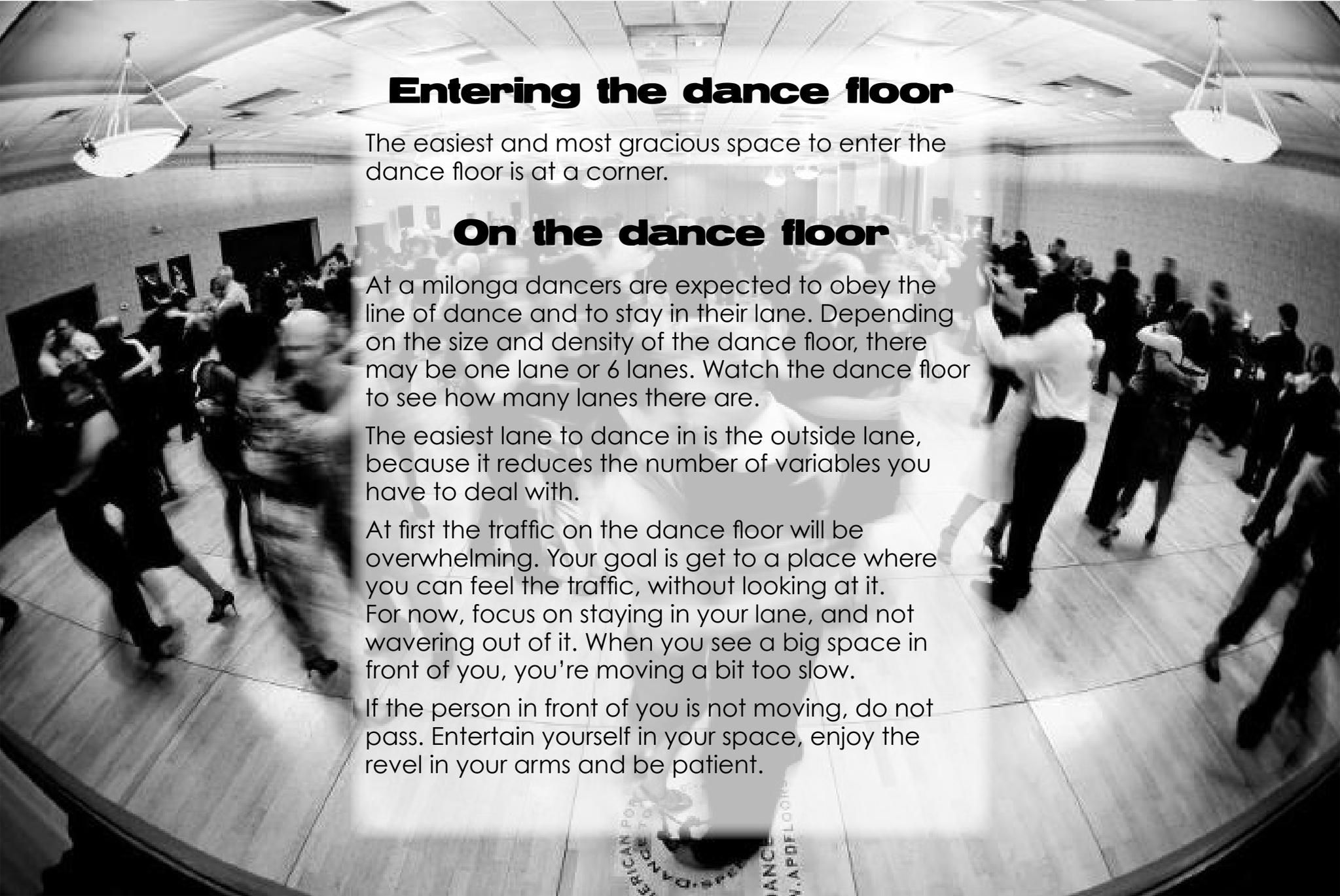
## **Contracting a dance**

Most dancers at milongas use the cabeceo. If you cannot get eye contact with a girl, do not go up right in front of her and ask her to dance.

How to do the cabeceo: Get eye contact with someone. Hold it. If she holds it, she is willing (or considering her willingness) to dance with you. Make some kind of nod to her or to the dance floor. If she smiles and/or nods back, or maintains eye contact, you have a contract. If she breaks eye contact or turns her face away, she has said "no".

If you are sitting at a table with women, they will think you are a real asshole if you don't dance with them. This is good if you are a new dancer, or shy, or need people to dance with. It's bad if you don't want to dance with them. It's ok to ask women at your table, and friends you are chatting with to dance with a verbal invitation instead of the cabeceo. But the cabeceo is always better.

As a beginner, you may not feel up to dancing an entire tanda. That's fine. You can wait until mid-way through the second song to contract a dance. That way you'll only dance the third and fourth songs of the tanda. (If it's a vals tanda, there may be only three songs.) You don't want to ask a woman to dance with only one song to go in the tanda. That's a bit rude. But it's ok to dance only two songs.



## **Entering the dance floor**

The easiest and most gracious space to enter the dance floor is at a corner.

## **On the dance floor**

At a milonga dancers are expected to obey the line of dance and to stay in their lane. Depending on the size and density of the dance floor, there may be one lane or 6 lanes. Watch the dance floor to see how many lanes there are.

The easiest lane to dance in is the outside lane, because it reduces the number of variables you have to deal with.

At first the traffic on the dance floor will be overwhelming. Your goal is get to a place where you can feel the traffic, without looking at it. For now, focus on staying in your lane, and not wavering out of it. When you see a big space in front of you, you're moving a bit too slow.

If the person in front of you is not moving, do not pass. Entertain yourself in your space, enjoy the revel in your arms and be patient.

## **At the end of the tanda**

Say "thank you" to your partner and walk her back to wherever you got her. Then go back to your spot. It's Not OK to hang around and chat her up. As long as you are with her, other men will respect you and steer clear, which may cause her to miss out on the next tanda.

## **At the end of the night**

The friendliest part of the milonga is at the end. Those who have stuck it out through the ups and downs of the night, keeping the faith to the bitter end share a special euphoric camaraderie. People who wouldn't give you the time of day all night may be boisterously friendly once the lights come on at the end of the milonga. It's a bit weird, but it's nice.

It's not ok to chat up women you just met, ask for their phone numbers, or ask them out. At the end of the night, it's common to look out for people who might need a ride or accompaniment to their transportation. This is genuine community care-taking and not an opportunity for hitting on fellow dancers. Be respectful and inspire confidence.

The best thing you can possibly do to ingratiate yourself as a new person is to help clean up afterwards.