

CROSSING THE LINE

by

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CHARACTERS

Piet MondriaanArtist

Theo van DoesburgArtist

Saskia de BoerHousekeeper for Mr.
Mondriaan

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ACT 1

(The year is 1924. The scene is the studio of the Dutch artist, Piet Mondriaan. At the back of the stage is a wall with two paintings on it. One is an abstract painting of tree outlines, with thin black lines for the trunks and curves at the top for branches. The background is sky blue. The other painting consists of two horizontal and two vertical black lines which look like a symmetrical noughts and crosses board, with a blue patch in the central segment. The rest of the canvas is white. This painting is tilted slightly to one side. Between the two paintings is a square window. It has four square clear panels of glass, with the frame in the form of a Greek cross. In the middle of the studio is a table with two chairs under it. On the table are tubes of yellow, red, blue, white and black paint and brushes, and there are several copies of De Stijl (The Style) magazine, in a neat pile. At the front of the stage, there are two easels facing the audience. One, stage left, holds a square canvas. This also has something like a noughts and crosses board pattern on it, in black, though the verticals are further to the left than on the painting on the wall. The bottom left segment is painted red, the other segments white. There are a few brushes and a tube of red paint on the ledge of the easel. The other easel is empty. There is a door in the middle of the wall stage left.)

(As the curtain rises, Mondriaan's housekeeper, Saskia, enters through the door. She is in her twenties, attractive and curvaceous. She is carrying a dusting brush. She looks around tentatively and starts to dust, first the back wall, then the table, and then she comes to the easel with the painting on it and pauses. She looks at the painting, tilts her head briefly to the left and to the right, looks around, pauses, dusts the canvas slightly, and shrugs her shoulders. She whistles occasionally as she dusts.)

Mondriaan: *(Off stage)* Saskia! Saskia!

(Saskia quickly returns to the table and pretends to dust it. Mondriaan

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enters. He is very tidily dressed in a neat double-breasted suit with a red tie)

Ah! There are you! What are you doing here? I thought I told you not to come into my studio.

Saskia: Sorry, Mr. Mondriaan. I forgot. Anyway, the door was open and I thought it could do with a dust.

Mondriaan: Dust? Dust? There's no dust in this house. *(Runs his finger along the table and examines it)*. Well, maybe there is, but do ask before you come into the studio. I don't want you damaging any of my work.

Saskia: I'm very careful, Mr. Mondriaan.

Mondriaan: Yes, I'm sure you are. Well, anyway, you're new here aren't you, so I'll overlook it this time.

(Mondriaan comes down stage left and looks at the painting on the easel).

You haven't touched this, have you?

Saskia: *(Trying to look innocent)*. Me, Mr. Mondriaan? No, Mr. Mondriaan.

(Saskia comes round to look at the work).

I did have a look at it, though.

Mondriaan: Did you indeed? And what did you think of it?

Saskia: *(Hesitates)* Well, if I'm honest, I wasn't sure what it was.

Mondriaan: *(Annoyed)* Not sure what it was? It *wasn't* anything. It *isn't* anything either. *(Correcting himself)*. Well, that's not quite true. It *is* a work of art, but it's not meant to represent anything, if that's what you mean. It's what is called abstract art. I've distilled the essence of reality into horizontals, verticals and primary colours, red here, blue and yellow elsewhere, but I wouldn't expect you to understand that, Saskia.

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- Saskia: Distilled what? I've heard of gin being distilled, but...
- (Very annoyed, Mondriaan tuts loudly and moves back to the table).*
- Sorry, Mr. Mondriaan, it's all those straight lines. I thought it might be a window at first, a bit like that one. *(Saskia points to the window at the back of the studio).* I like curves myself. I think they're much prettier.
- Mondriaan: *(Turns to face Saskia).* Curves? They went out with the ark. You see, Saskia, I am concerned with pointing people to a new, more perfect world, and I am doing that by using only straight lines. You know, you'll never find a straight line in nature.
- Saskia: *(Thinks for a moment).* What about blades of grass? They're straight, aren't they?
- Mondriaan: They look straight, don't they, but if you inspect them closely, they are always curved at the top. That's why I have to use straight lines.
- Saskia: Oh, if you say so, Mr. Mondriaan. I can't say I've ever looked closely at a blade of grass. But anyway, what's wrong with curves. *(Runs her hands down her body).* Some gentlemen seem to like *my* curves.
- (Saskia looks at the abstract painting on the back wall depicting trees. She points to it and goes over to it).*
- This painting's got curves on it, too, hasn't it? Who painted it?
- Mondriaan: *(Annoyed and mumbles).* I did.
- Saskia: Sorry?
- Mondriaan: *(Clears his throat and speaks slightly more clearly, but embarrassed).* I did.
- Saskia: Oh, well I like that. You can tell what it is. They're like trees.
- Mondriaan: Yes, that's right. I painted it ten years ago, before I saw the light.
- Saskia: Light? What light? You do talk in riddles, Mr. Mondriaan.

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- Mondriaan: (*Slightly exasperated*). Before I saw the error of my ways and stopped representing *things*, like trees. Before we founded The Style.
- Saskia: The Style? There you go again.
- Mondriaan: It's the group of artists I belong to. We believe that art should take us beyond this world and point us to another, more perfect, reality.
- Saskia: Oh (*not quite sure what to make of what Mondriaan is telling her*). That sounds...er, interesting.
- Mondriaan: It is, but look, I should take that painting down. I don't know why it's still up there. (*Changing the subject*). Anyway, Saskia, I have a busy day today and I need you to run some errands for me.
- Saskia: What sort of errands?
- Mondriaan: Some food shopping at the local Albert Heijn. My colleague Theo van Doesburg said he would call in this morning, and Georges Vantongerloo is coming for lunch.
- Saskia: Vantonger-who?
- Mondriaan: Vantongerloo. He's Belgian.
- Saskia: Oh.
- Mondriaan: Have you ever been to Belgium?
- Saskia: No, never. Never had any reason to. I've had Belgian beer, though. That makes me all squiffy. Straight lines don't always seem straight then. What's that one I like, Stella Tortoise, is it
- Mondriaan: I think you mean Stella Artois.
- Saskia: Stella Artois, that's it. I've had Belgian waffles, too. Mmmm (*Enjoys thinking about them, and as she does so, moves along the wall to the other painting, with the noughts and crosses pattern*). Hey, they've got

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straight lines on them, haven't they, a bit like your paintings, Mr. Mondriaan.

Mondriaan: (*Getting even more exasperated*). I can assure you, Saskia, I do not paint Belgian waffles!

Saskia: (*Continues in her food-centred reverie*). And then there's Belgian chocolates. I've had a few of those, Mr. Mondriaan. (*Chuckles*). Some were straight, some had curves, though, some were ovals, some were...

Mondriaan: (*Interrupting Saskia*). Yes, yes. Very well. Saskia. Look, we can't stand here all day discussing Belgian chocolates, or waffles or beer for that matter. Here's a list of what I need you to buy at the shop. (*Holds out a list*).

Saskia: (*Moves back to the table. Takes the list and reads it*). Half a kilo of cheese, quarter of ham, one loaf of bread. White or brown?

Mondriaan: White.

Saskia: And a litre of milk. Is that all?

Mondriaan: Yes, now here's a gulder (*Mondriaan hands Saskia a note*). There should be some change, so make sure you bring it to me. Now off you go.

Saskia: Very well, Mr. Mondriaan. (*As Saskia is about to exit, she turns to Mondriaan*). No Belgian chocolates then?