

3 FRED ASTAIRE AND GINGER ROGERS PICK THEMSELVES UP

When the characters played by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers dance together for the first time in the 1936 movie *Swing Time*, they fall in love, jump a fence, and change the course of their lives. Ginger (her name in the movie is Penny, but she and Astaire have such consistent personas in all their films together that to audiences they are always “Ginger” and “Fred”) is employed as an instructor at a dance academy, and Fred—though she does not yet know it—is a professional dancer. He first pesters her out on the street, then has the gall to follow her to work, where a sign hangs outside the studio: “To know how to dance is to know how to control oneself.” Inside, another promises: “Our young ladies are sweet-tempered, patient, and understanding.” But when Fred signs up for a lesson with Ginger, she’s livid.

According to the unwritten rules of Astaire-Rogers films, to know how to dance is to know how to cut loose and flout convention: if you’re dissatisfied with the world you have, you can dance your way to a better one. As Fred’s dance lesson begins he pretends to be so clumsy that he cannot execute a simple triple