

Pas de Deux

By

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SHE liked them young, young men; princes. She liked them young when she could like them at all because by now, by this particular minute in time she had had it with older men, clever men, men who always knew what to say, who smiled a certain kind of smile when she talked about passion, about the difference between hunger and love. The young ones didn't smile, or if they did it was with a touching puzzlement because they didn't quite see, weren't sure, didn't fully understand: knowing best what they did not know, that there was still so much to learn.

"Learn what?" Edward's voice from the cage of memory, deep voice, "what's left to learn?" Reaching for the bottle and the glass, pouring for himself. "And who'll do the teaching? You?" That smile like an insect's, like the blank button eyes of a doll made of metal, made from a weapon, born from a knife and see him there, pale sheets crushed careless at the foot of the bed, big canopied bed like a galleon inherited from his first wife the sheets too, custom-made sheets all of it given them as a wedding present by his first wife's mother: Adele, her name was and he liked to say it, liked to pretend was it pretense? that he had fucked her too, going from mother to daughter in a night, a suite of nights, spreading the seed past four spread legs and prim Alice could never compare, said Edward, with the grand Adele, Adele the former ballet dancer, Adele who had been everywhere, lived in Paris and Hong Kong, written a biography of Balanchine, Adele who wore nothing but black from the day she turned twenty-one and "I don't understand," he would say, head back, knee bent, his short, fat cock like some half-eaten sausage, "what you think you can teach me, aren't you being just a little bit absurd?"

"We all have something to learn," she said and he laughed, left the room to return with a book, *Balanchine & Me*: Balanchine in color on the cover, a wee black-and-white of Adele on the back. "Read this," putting the book into her hands. "Find out how much you don't know." Whiskey breath and settling back into bed, glass on his chest, big hairy chest like an animal's, he liked to lie naked with the windows open, lie there and look at her and "Are you cold?" he would say, knowing she was freezing, that her muscles were cramping. "Do you feel a draft?"

No, she could have said, or *yes* or *fuck you* or a million other responses but in the end she had made none of them, said nothing, got out. Left him there in his canopied bed and found her own place, her own space, living above her studio: dance studio, she had been away for a long time but now she was back and soon, another month or two she would have enough money maybe to keep the heat on all the time, keep the lights on, keep going. *Keep on going*: that was her word now, her world, motion at any cost. She was too old to be a dancer? had been away too long, forgotten too much, lost the fascistic grace of the body in torment, the body as tool of motion, of

the will? *No*. As long as she had legs, arms, a back to bend or twist, as long as she could move she could dance.

Alone.

In the cold.

In the dark.

Sometimes when it got too dark even for her she would leave, head off to the clubs where for the price of a beer she could dance all night to thrash or steelcore, a dance different from the work she did at the barre: jerked and slammed past exhaustion, hair stuck slick to her face, shirt stuck to her body, slapping water on her neck in the lavatory through the smoke and stink and back out with her head down, eyes closed, body fierce and martyred by the motion; incredible to watch, she knew it, people told her; men told her, following her as she stalked off the floor, leaning close to her stool at the bar and they said she was terrific, a terrific dancer; and closer, closer still the question inevitable, itself a step in the dance: why was she dancing alone? "You need a partner," but of course that was *not* possible, not really because there was no one she wanted, no one who could do what she could do and so she would shrug, smile sometimes but mostly not, shrug and shake her head and "No," turning her face away. "No thanks."

Sometimes they bought her drinks, sometimes she drank them; sometimes, if they were young enough, kind enough, she would take them home, up past the studio to the flat with its half-strung blinds and rickety futon, unsquared piles of dance magazines, old toe shoes and bloody wraps and she would fuck them, slowly or quickly, in silence or with little panting yelps or cries like a dog's, head back in the darkness and the blurred sound of the space heater like an engine running, running itself breathless and empty and dry. Afterward she would lie beside them, up on one elbow and talk, tell them about dancing, about passion, about the difference between hunger and love and there in the dark, the rising and falling of her voice processional as water, as music, lying there in the moist warmth created by their bodies they were moved by her words, by her body to create it anew, make the bridge between love and hunger: they were young, they could go all night. And then they would look up at her and "You're beautiful," they said, they all said it. "You're so beautiful; can I call you?"

"Sure," she would say. "Sure, you can call me," leaning over them, breathing slowed, the sweat on her breasts drying to a thin prickle and see their faces, watch them smile, see them dress jeans and T-shirts, ripped vests and camouflage coats, bandannas on their heads, tiny little earrings in silver and gold and watch them go and before they go give them the number, press it into their hands; the number of the cleaner's where she used to take Edward's suits but how was it cruel, she asked herself, told herself, how was it wrong not to offer what she did not have? Far worse to pretend, string them along when she knew that she had already given all she had to give, one night, her discourse, she never took the same one twice and there were

always so many, so many clubs, so many bars in this city of bars and clubs, lights in the darkness, the bottle as cold as knowledge in her warm and slippery grasp.

Sometimes she walked home, from the bars and the clubs; it was nothing for her to walk ten, thirty, fifty blocks, no one ever bothered her, she always walked alone. Head down, hands at her sides like a felon, a movie criminal, *just keep walking* through darkness, four a.m. rain or the last fine scornful drift of snow, ice like cosmetics to powder her face, chill to gel the sweat in her hair, short hair, Edward said she looked like a lifer: "What were you in for?" as she stood ruffling her hair in the bathroom mirror, sifting out the loose snips, dead curls and his image sideways in the glass as if distorted, past focus, in flux. "You don't have the facial structure for a cut like that," one-hand reaching to turn her face, aim it toward the light like a gun above; that smile, like an abdicated king's. "Once Alice cut her hair off, all her hair, to spite me; she denied it, said she only wanted a different look but I knew her, I knew that's what it was. Adele," the name as always honey in his mouth, "knew too, and she cut off *her* hair to spite Alice. Of course, *she* looked terrific, really sexy and butch, but she had the face for it. Bone structure," almost kindly to her, patting her face with both hands, patty-cake, baby face, squeezing her cheeks in the mirror. "That's what you don't have."

And now this cold walk, each individual bone in her face aching, teeth aching, sound of the wind in her ears even when she was safe inside, door locked, space heater's orange drone and as late as it was, as cold as it was she stripped down to leggings, bare feet, bare breasts and danced in the dark, sweating, panting, the stitch cruel in her side, in her throat, in her heart, tripped by unseen obstacles, one hip slamming hard into the barre, metallic thud of metal to flesh, flesh to metal like mating, like fucking and she wished she had brought someone home with her, it would have been nice to fuck a warm boy in the dark but she was alone and so she danced instead, spun and stumbled and hit the barre, hit the barre, hit the barre until she literally could not move, stood knees-locked and panting, panting from fear of stasis as outside, past the yellowed shades, the sun at last began to rise.

Adele's book lay where she had tossed it, square and silent on the bathroom floor but one night, back from dancing and sick to her stomach the beer, something had not agreed with her from the toilet she picked it up, skimmed through the chapters, the inset pictures, and although it was very poorly written as a writer Adele had apparently been a fine dancer still there was something, one phrase arresting like a blow, a slap in the face: *For me, said Adele, Balanchine was a prince. You must find your own prince, you must make him your own.*

Find your prince: Prince Edward! and she laughed, pants rucked down around her ankles, thin yellow diarrhea and she laughed and laughed but the phrase stayed with her, clung like the memory of motion to the bones and she began to look, here and there, at the young men at the clubs, look and gauge and wonder and sometimes at night, pinned and breathing beneath them, talking of hunger and love she would wonder what a prince was, how to see one: how one knew: was it something in the

body, some burn, some vast unspeaking signal? The body does not lie: she knew this. And Adele considering the small black-and-white picture, that arched avian nose, high bones to show like a taunt to life itself the skull inside the meat had more than likely known it too.

The body does not lie.

Ten years old on the way to ballet class, forced by her mothers instigation: "So you'll learn how to move, sweetie," her mother so small and fat and anxious, patting her daughter's cheeks, round cheeks, small bony chin like a misplaced fist. "So you'll be more comfortable with your body."

"But I am comfortable," sullen child's lie, head averted, temple pressed stubborn to the hot glass of the car window. "Anyway I'd rather play soccer, why can't I sign up for soccer?"

"Dance is better." The old car swung inexpertly into the strip mall parking lot, DANCE ACADEMY in stylized curlicue blue, cheap rice-paper blinds between MINDY'S DOG GROOMING and a discount hand-tool outlet. Smaller inside than it seemed from the street, ferocious dry air-conditioned cold and three girls listless at the barre, two older than she, one much younger, all in cotton-candy colors; from past the walls the sounds of barking dogs. The woman at the desk asking "Will this be for the full semester?" and her mother's diffidence, well, we just wanted to try the introductory sessions, just let her try and see if she

"I don't want to dance," her own voice, not loud but the girls looked up, all of them, starlings on a branch, prisoners in a cell. "I want to play soccer."

The woman's gaze; she did not bother to smile. "Oh, no," she said. "No sports for you, you've got a dancer's body."

"Are you a dancer?" Shouted into her ear, that eager young voice. "I mean like professionally?"

"Yes," she said. "No."

"Can I buy you a drink? What're you drinking?" and it was one beer, then two, then six and they stopped on the way to her place, stopped and bought a bottle of V.O. a princely gesture? and sat in the dark doing shots as he undressed her, stripped like skin the moist drape of her T-shirt, her spartan white panties, her black cotton skirt till she sat naked and drunk and shivering, her nipples hard, all the light gone from the room and "The way you move," he said, kept saying, hushed voice of glimpsed marvels. "Wow. The way you *move*, I knew right away you were some kind of dancer, right, I mean like for a living. Are you in the ballet? Are you "

"Here," she said, "here, I'll show you," and downstairs, hand in hand and naked in the dark, the lessening angle of his erection but he was young and it was easy, one or two or six little pulls and he was stiff as a board, as a barre, stiff and ready and

she danced for him first, danced around him, Salome without the veils: rubbing her breasts against his back, trapping his thighs with her own and since he was drunk it took longer but not so very long, not much time after all before they were lying there, warmth illusion and panting into one another's mouths and she told him the difference between love and hunger, between what is needed and what must be had and "You're so beautiful," he said, slurred words and a smile of great simplicity, a deep and tender smile; it was doubtful he had heard anything she had said. His penis against her like a finger, the touch confiding: "So can I, can I call you?"

Dust, grains of dirt stuck to her skin, to the skin of her face against the floor. No prince: or not for her: her body said so. "Sure," she said. "Sure, you can call me."

When he had gone she went back upstairs, took up Adele's book, and began again to read it page by page.

No more ballet classes, dancers body or no, she was out and now it was too late for tap or modern dance, too late for soccer and so she spent the summer with her father, dragging up and down the four flights of his walk-up, silent and staring at the TV: "Why don't you go out?" Lighting up a menthol cigarette, he smoked three and a half packs a day; by the time she was eighteen he would be dead. "Meet some kids or something."

"There aren't any kids in this building," she said. A musical on TV, the Arts in America channel; two women singing about travel and trains. "And it's too hot to go out." The air conditioner worked but not well; endless the scent of mildew and smoke, of her father's aftershave when he dressed to go out: "Keep the door locked," as he left, to whom would she open it anyway? Sitting up by the TV, chin in hand in the constant draft, the sound of traffic outside. In September he sent her back to her mother, back to school; she never went to a dance class again.

"It's a part-time position," the woman said. She might have been twenty, very dark skin, very dark eyes; severe, like a young Martha Graham. "The students we have a full class load now "

"How many?" Fifty.

Fifty dancers, all much younger than she, all fierce, committed, ambitious. Toe shoes and a shower, the smell of hand cream, the smell of warm bodies: glossy floors and mirrors, mirrors everywhere, the harder gloss of the barre and *no*, a voice like Adele's in her head, *you cannot do this*: "No," she said, rising, pushing out of the chair so it almost tipped, so she almost fell. "No, I can't, I can't teach a class right now."

"It's not a teaching position," sternly, "it's an *assistant's* "

Keep the shower room clean, keep the records, help them warm up, watch them dance, no, oh no. "Oh no," as she walked home, hands at her sides, *what were you*

in for? Life: a lifer. Edward's number was still in her book, still written in black ink. She could not keep both the studio and the flat: the futon, the dance magazines, her unconnected telephone all moved downstairs, shoved in a corner, away from the barre. Sometimes the toilet didn't flush. The young men never seemed to mind.

Adele's book lay beneath her pillow, Balanchine's face turned down like an unwanted jack, prince of hearts, king of staves: and upturned black-and-white Adele, pinched nose and constant stare, our lady of perpetual motion.

"You look awful," Edward said, stern as the young woman had been, there behind her desk: there in the restaurant, staring at her. "Did you know that? Completely haggard."

"Money," she said. "I need to borrow some money."

"You're in no position to pay it back."

"No," she said. "I'm not. Not now. But when I "

"You must be crazy," he said and ordered for them both, cream of leek and tarragon soup, some kind of fish. White wine. The server looked at her strangely; Adele could be heard to laugh, a little laugh inhuman, clockwork wound the wrong way. "Where are you living now, in a Dumpster?"

She would not say; she would not show him. He wanted to fuck, afterward, after dinner but she wouldn't do that either, arms crossed and mute and "Where's all this from, anyway?" pushing back at the sheets, seemingly serene, not disappointed; his erection looked smaller somehow, fat but weak like a toothless snake, like a worm. The rooms were so warm, the bedroom as hot as a beating heart; the big bed still looked like a galleon, sheets and hangings cherry red and "All this devotion," he said. "Suffering for your art. You never gave much of a shit about ballet, about dance when I knew you."

That's not true but she didn't say it, how explain anything to him? and ballet of course brought up Adele: "You've never even read her book on Balanchine," scratching his testicles. "If you cared about dance at all, you would."

He was always a fool, advised Adele: *find your prince* and "I need the money now," she said. "Tonight," and to her surprise he gave it to her, right then, in cash; how rich he must be, to give so much so casually. Putting it into her hands, closing her fingers around it and "Now suck me," he said. Standing there naked, his cock begun at last to stir. "That's right, be a good girl, suck me off."

She said nothing.

"Or I'll take the money back."

The bills were warm, warm as the room around her, warm as his hand around her own and in one motion she brought their linked hands, his own hand topmost to rise, fast and sharp to smash under his chin, hit so hard his hand jerked open, her hand free, the bills falling to the floor and gone then, shoving out the door with her fingers

stinging and burning, burning in the cold outside.

Adele was silent.

"Do you " One of the young ones, crouched between her legs, her canted knees on the futon with its one wrinkled sheet, its coverlet faded to the color of sand. "Do you have condoms? Because I don't."

"No," she said. "I don't either."

His lower lip thrust out like a child defrauded, a pouting child. "Well than, what're we going to do?"

"Dance," she said. "We can dance."

She got a job at a used bookstore, erratic schedule, the hours nobody wanted and every hour, every minute a chafe, an itch unbearable to stand so still this way, medical textbooks and romance novels, celebrity bios and how-to books once even *Balanchine & Me*, which she instantly stuffed into her backpack without thinking twice; why not? it was hers already and this a better copy, the photograph sharper, the pages not bent and soft and torn taking money across the counter and she knew it was wrong, she knew it was not the right thing to do but sometimes she overcharged for the books, not much, a dollar here or there and pocketed the money, kept the change, what else could she do? The job paid nothing and took so much, stole time which she needed, had to have: no studio would hire her, no company until she was good enough, professional enough to teach and she had missed so much, lost so much time: she had to make up, catch up, keep working and there were only so many hours in the day, already she woke at six to dance before work, work all day and then out to the clubs at night for that other dancing that while exhausting somehow refreshed her, made her new again, ready to dance again so what else was there to do?

And sometimes she did not like this either, but her world was full, now, of things she could not like she let the young men buy things for her, breakfast, a bag of doughnuts, carry-out coffee which she drank later, cold coffee in the cold, walking to work at the bookstore and then somehow they found out about the stealing, she never knew how but they did and they fired her, kept her last week's wages to pay for what she had taken, and that night she danced as if she were dying, flailing arms and her head swinging in circles, she felt as if her neck would snap, wanted it to snap, break and let her head go flying to smash red and gray to silence against the wall: *no prince for you*, nothing, nothing from Adele even though she asked: *what would you do? tell me, I need to know, I have to know what to do* and afterward, alone and panting by the bar from which she could not afford to buy a drink, approached not by one of the young men, no prince but someone else, an older man in black jeans and a jacket who told her she was one terrific dancer, really sexy, and if she was interested he had a proposition to make.

"Naked?"

"Private parties," he said. The smell of menthol cigarettes, a red leather couch above which hung a series of Nagle nudes and "They never touch you, never. That's not in the contract, I'm not paying you for that. They're not paying *me* for that." Gazing at her as if she were already naked. "You ever wear makeup? You could stand a little lipstick. Do something with your hair too, maybe."

"How much?" she asked, and he told her.

Silence.

"When?" she asked, and he told her that too.

Too-loud music, she brought her own tape player and a selection of tapes, twenty-two different choices from *The Stripper* to soft rock to thrash, she could dance to anything and it didn't matter as much as she had feared, being naked, not as bad as it might have been although at first it was terrible, the things they said, they were so different from the young men at the clubs, being naked must make the difference but after a while there was no difference after all or perhaps she had forgotten how to listen, forgotten everything but the feel of the music and that had not changed, the music and the sweat and the muscles in her body, dancer's muscles and she did tour parties a night, six on a good night; one night she did ten but that was too much, she had almost fallen off the table, almost broken her arm on a chair's unpadded back, and with that much work she had no time for herself, for the real dancing, alone at the barre, alone in the dark and the winter, it seemed, would last forever, her hands were always frozen, broken windows in her studio and she covered them over with cardboard and duct tape, covered them over with shaking hands and her hands, she thought, were growing thinner or perhaps her fingers were longer, it was hard to tell, always so dark in here, but she thought she might have lost some weight, a few pounds, five or ten and at the parties they called her skinny, or scrawny, *get your scrawny ass movin', babe* or *hey where's your tits?* but she had gone past the point of listening, of caring; had discovered that she would never discover her prince in places like this, her partner, the one she had to have: *find your prince* and although Adele made less sense these days, spoke less frequently still she was the only one who understood: the new copy gone to rags like the old one, reading between the lines and while she talked very little about her own life it was a biography of Balanchine after all still some of her insights, her guesses and pains emerged and in the reading emerged anew: she's like *me*, she thought, reading certain passages again and again, she knows what it's like to need to dance, to push the need away and away like an importunate lover, like a prince only to seek it again with broken hands and a broken body, seek it because it is the only thing you need: the difference between love and hunger: *find your prince* and find a partner, because no one can dance forever alone.

Different clubs now in this endless winter, places she had never been, streets she had avoided but she could not go back to some of the old places, too many young men there whose faces she knew, whose bodies she knew, who could never be her prince and something told her to hurry: time tumbling and burning, time seeping away and it was Adele's voice in her head, snatches of the book, passages mumbled by memory so often they took on the force of prayer, of chant, plainsong garbled by beating blood in the head as she danced, as she danced, as she danced: and the young men did not approach as often or with such enthusiasm although her dance was still superb, even better now than it had ever been; sometimes she caught them staring, walking off the floor and they would turn their heads, look away, did they think she had not seen? Eyes closed still she knew: *the body does not lie* but the ones who did speak, who did approach were different now, a fundamental change: "Hey," no smile, wary hand on the drink. "You with anybody?"

I am looking for a prince. "No," she would say, surface calm and back at her place it was the one rule on which she insisted, she would not go to them the rigor of vision, letting the body decide

"You got a rubber?"

"No."

and again and again the same report, no prince and no partner and indifferent she would slide away, sometimes they had not even finished, were still thrashing and gulping but these owned not even the promise of kindness and so were owed no kindness in return: indifferent she shoved them away, pushed them off and most grew angry, a few of them threatened to hit her, one or two of them did but in the end they cursed, they dressed, they left and she was left alone, pinprick lights through the cold cardboard, sweet uneasy smell from the space-heater coils: bending and flexing her feet and her fingers, all pared far past mere meat to show the stretch and grace of tendon, the uncompromising structure of the bone.

A weekend's worth of frat parties, at one place they threw beer on her, at another they jeered because she was so thin and would not let her dance, sent her away: it was happening more and more now, she might do two parties a night, one, sometimes there were no calls for her at all. In the office with the Nagle prints: "What are you, anorexic or something? I don't deal, you know, in freaks, I don't want that trade. You want to keep dancing, you better start eating."

What he did not understand, of course, what Adele understood superbly was that the meat was not necessary, in fact became a mere impediment to motion: see how much more easily she turned, how firmly in command of space, of vertical distance *ballon*, dancers called it, that aerial quality also called elevation how wedded she was to motion when there was less of the body to carry? Why sacrifice that for the desire of fools?

"You must weigh ninety pounds."

She shrugged.

"Anyway you're lucky. There's a party next weekend, some kind of farewell party, the guy picked you out of the picture book. You especially he said he wants."

She shrugged again.

"He wants you early, maybe a little extra-special dance no touching, he knows that, but it's like a present for the guest of honor, right? So be there by eight," handing her one of the go-to cards, three-by-five with an address and phone number.

Edward's address.

"Hey, I need a, I need a rubber or something. You got something?" No.

"Hey, you're you're, like, *bleeding* down there, are you on the rag or something?"

No answer.

"You should have taken the money," Edward said, watching her walk in: the faux library, books unread, shelves full of silly crystal frogs, squat jade warriors, girls with ruby eyes. "You look even worse than you did the last time I saw you, even worse than that ugly Polaroid in the book I can't imagine you're getting much business; are you? Is this your idea of professional dance?"

She shrugged.

"Given up on the ballet?" and pouring wine, one glass; then shrugging and pouring another, go on, help yourself. The hired help. Like a maid, or a delivery boy; a prostitute. "The man I spoke to said you don't have sex with your clients is that true?"

"I dance," she said. The room looked exactly the same, same quality of light, same smells; in the bedroom, on the bed the sheets would be red, and slick, and soft. "I show up and I dance."

"Naked."

"In a g-string."

" 'Air on a G String,' " sipping his wine. "Can you dance to that? Does it have a good beat? *Christ*," with real distaste as she removed her coat, "look at you. You need a doctor, you're nothing but bones."

"Is there a party?" she said. "Or did you make that up?"

"No, there's a party but it's not here, not tonight. Tonight you can dance for me; if you're good I'll even tip you is tipping permitted? or is it added on to the bill?"

She said nothing. She was thinking of Adele, Adele here in these rooms, choosing the bed linens, choosing the bed on which, Edward boasted, the two of them had

made love before the wedding, before he and daughter Alice were even formally engaged: *the way her body moved*, he had said, *it was unbelievable* and "Tell me about Adele," she said, sting of wine on her lips, on the sores inside her mouth. Thread of blood in the pale wine. "When was the last time you saw her?"

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"Just *tell* me," she said.

It was here, he said, she was in town and we met for dinner, some Swedish restaurant, only four or five tables, best-kept secret in town but of course she knew, she always knew about everything. "And after dinner we came back home," he said. "To our bed."

"How old was she then?"

"What difference can that possibly make?"

"How old was she?"

"You know, looking at you now it's hard to believe I ever touched you. I certainly wouldn't want to touch you now."

"How old was she?" and he told her, confirming what she had already known: like herself and the young men, the would-be princes, the parallel held true and there on one of the shelves how had she missed it? a photograph of Adele, Adele at thirty maybe or maybe slightly older, that pinched stare relaxed now into the gaze of the true Medusa, queen of an older motion, sinuous and rapt and "Finish your drink," Edward said; his voice came to her as if from far away, the way Adele had used to sound. "Finish your drink and you can go."

Shall I go? to the picture of Adele who without perceptibly moving her lips said *no, no you must not go, that is the one thing you must not do* and bending, she took up the book, *Balanchine & Me* from the bag where the tapes were, the music, she had her own music tonight, Adele's humming voice in her head and "Take a look," she said to Edward, gaily, almost smiling, "take a look," and she began to strip, shoes and stockings, skirt and blouse, each piece shed deliberate as a blow and "You're sick," Edward said; he did not want to look at her. "You're very sick, you ought to see a doctor."

"I don't need a doctor." Bra off, her flat breasts like airless pancakes, like starving people on TV and without music, without sound she began to dance: not the party dances, not even what she did alone with the barre but something different, more basic, closer to the heart of the bone and as she danced panting, sweat down her sides and her face, sweat in her mouth and Edward standing glass in hand, staring and staring and she talked about the prince, the prince and the partner and all her seeking, all her lost and wandering ways: was she talking out loud? and then to the picture, the photograph of Adele: does he know? can he learn, will he ever understand?

The body does not lie, said Adele. *But he is trapped in his body. He was always there, for me, for you but he is trapped, he needs to get out. I could not help him*

get out so now you must. Get him out

and "Get out," he said: her whirling body, one leg high, high, even with her shoulder, look at those tendons, that flex and stretch! The difference between lead and air, meat and feathers, hunger and love and "Listen now," she said: *listen now* and the little picture of Adele lit up, bloomed as if light rose from within, lit outward from the heart and with both hands she grabbed for the figurines, jade and crystal, frog and soldier and threw them to the floor, at the walls, up and down to smash and glitter, topple and fall and, shouting, he grabbed for her, tried to take her hands, tried to join the dance but *he is trapped* and "I know," she said to Adele, the glowing picture, "oh I know," and when he came for her again she hit him as hard as she could with the ball of her foot, karate kick, fierce and sure in the crotch to make him go down, fall, lie cramped and curled on the silence of the floor, curled about the red worm of his cock, the cradle of his balls: like a worm caught on the sidewalk, curling in panic in the absence of the earth.

The body does not lie, said Adele.

Edward gasping, a wet, weeping sound and she kicked him again, harder this time, a slow deliberate kick: *En pointe*, she said with a smile to the picture, and with one finger hooked the g-string from the cresting pelvic arch.