

THE MAN WHO COULDN'T DANCE by Jason Katims

ERIC and Gail, in their thirties, former lovers, stand over the crib of Gail's baby, Elizabeth, whom she has had with her new husband, Fred. Eric starts to cry after picking Elizabeth up. After replacing the baby in the crib, he tries to explain his reaction.

SCENE: The converted attic of Gail's house in Connecticut.

TIME: The present.

ERIC: I can't dance, Gail. [GAIL: You can't dance. This is why you're crying? Eric, a lot of people can't dance.] I don't know why I can't dance. But it's—I can't. I can't make my body move in these ways that the music is demanding that I move. It's just so goddamn embarrassing. The situation. I mean, standing in public around hundreds of people who are displaying their purest, truest selves. I mean, it takes them no more than two drinks and their souls are out there on the dance floor. Their goodness. Their sensuality. They're sharing and loving. I watch that, look at that. But my body fights it. I start to analyze the music. The rhythm. The time signature. I understand the theory of dancing. The *idea* of spontaneously sharing in this moment that exists now and only now. The give and take with your partner. Two mirrors on a land where gravity holds you to this point and then leaves you free. And that the universe happens right there and then. Like, truth. I understand this intellectually. But Gail, I never have experienced it. I can't dance. [GAIL: How did Elizabeth make you think of that?] When we were together. There were all these times when you would arrange for us to be in these places. These parties. And invariably there would be a band, or music playing and invariably people would start dancing. [GAIL: I would arrange this? Like I did this to you?] Invariably you would want to dance. And I wouldn't dance with you. I wouldn't dance with you, Gail. And I could see the hurt register on your face. I could see the anger build within you.

I could see that this just wouldn't do for you. [GAIL: Why didn't you just say I can't dance. Why didn't you just tell me?] Because it was the dam holding the water. If I let that out. That one thing, everything would follow. I couldn't dance. I couldn't have a normal talk about the weather with a neighbor without getting into a conversation about God, love, and eternity. I mean, after all, the weather has these huge connotations. I couldn't act correctly in social situations. I couldn't sacrifice truth for a relationship. I couldn't hold you when you needed to be held because I wanted you to be stronger. Because I wanted to be stronger. I couldn't ask you for the warmth of your touch out of need. I couldn't let myself. I would only ask for your touch out of strength. Out of something that wouldn't become sick and interdependent and symbiotic. I wasn't able to do these things. I don't know, Gail. I mean, you marrying Fred didn't really say anything to me. It was like something in this continuum. This cycle. I mean, it was this thing that happened in my life. The love of my life got married to another man. It didn't seem permanent. But the fact that Elizabeth... The fact that this angel ... this unbelievable gift isn't mine. And will never be mine. This is killing me. [GAIL: Oh my God, Eric. You're human.] I'll never have a daughter, Gail. [GAIL: Yes, you will.] I'm thirty-seven. I have done nothing but make myself more isolated, unavailable, and unappealing. Believe it or not, it's difficult picking up women with this type of conversation. I work for four dollars an hour, Gail. I never earned a college degree. I can't bring myself to work for someone who is not producing something with some kind of goodness. That rules out ninety-eight percent of job openings. And the other two percent pay approximately four dollars an hour. I am not really going to change. I don't know why this is. People think I make these choices. But you've got to believe me, Gail, I have no control. I can't dance.

