

# The Sleeping Beauty



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Former ballerina Sharp presents a sentimental portrait of two ballet dancers, Sandra Ellis and Adam LaSalle, in her debut novel (after her collection *White Swan, Black Swan*). Best friends since the age of 15, Sandra and Adam become lovers in their 20s, by which point Adam has left Balanchine's New York City Ballet for starring roles with Baryshnikov's American Ballet Theater, while Sandra remains a loyal member of the corps. Sharp frames the novel, set in the '80s, with the fairy tale of "Sleeping Beauty," a story that Balanchine had in reality always wanted to choreograph but never fully did. Here, though, Sandra serves as the inspiration for Balanchine's staging of the tale: she catches his eye because of the passion Adam has awoken, and Balanchine plucks her from the corps to transform her into a principal dancer in the epic. But Sandra struggles to choose between her relationship with Adam and the total commitment and sacrifice she believes Balanchine requires. The point of view shifts between each corner of this triangle, often dragging with Adam and Sandra's inner monologues but sparkling with Balanchine's richly reimagined story. Sharp offers a detailed insider view of the ballet world, but her love story, though intelligently written, can mire in the maudlin. (July)

reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

\*Starred Review\* As she did in her superb short story collection, *White Swan, Black Swan*(2001), Sharp, a former dancer, dramatizes the romance, ambition, and obsessive eroticism of the dance world in her ravishing first novel, adeptly partnering real-life figures with fictional creations. Set in the early 1980s at the height of American ballet's frenzied popularity and the onset of the AIDS epidemic, it stars the genius dance master George Balanchine, now aging and haunted. As he dreams of creating one last epic work, a sumptuous *Sleeping Beauty*, two young dancers long for greatness. Adam, a sexual magnet for men and women, has left Balanchine's company for Baryshnikov's and become a star, but Sandra, fragile and elusive, continues to dance in Balanchine's corps. Opposites attract, but love is a liability in their competitive realm. Just as a dancer fuses with her roles, Sharp fully inhabits the troubled psyches and hard-driven bodies of her commanding yet maddening characters, describing with transporting detail everything from a costume's cut and sparkle to a tragic kiss. Sharp's bewitchingly sensual and trenchant tale embodies the sublime and the monstrous aspects of dance and explores our depthless capacity for exultation and suffering. Donna Seaman

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A noteworthy, if melancholy, examination of the dancer's life: years of suffering for moments of beauty. -- Kirkus Reviews, May 1, 2005

For high drama and steamy sex delivered with craft, take *First Love to the beach*. -- San Francisco Chronicle, June 19, 2005 --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

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