Ballroom Dancing

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My father did her hair that night as he always did, as long as he talked her into keeping it long. He'd stand behind her with the hairbrush and pull her ponytail through the wire chignon form and tuck and pin loose ends until it came out tight and sexy as a seal, just the way she hated it, and hated his fingertips cupped around the bun as if it were a nice fat breast. He'd ask me to judge if it was set too low, or high.

That night she was the best I remember of her, in her three strands of fake pearls, her glazed white dress with bird's-wing sleeves and collar. We walked the two blocks to Mrs. Keller's dance studio, where we took turns, parents, then young ladies and gentlemen, traveling through our box-steps under lowered lights, then only fathers with daughters, across the unsteady surface, my carefully pinned mother at the side, holding the ballet bar, both parents lost to each other. The steps came hard to me. I brought all my delicate instrumentation to bear on keeping my mother's place in the dance under Mrs. Keller's hard brown eyes.