

## BALLROOM DANCING

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.