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Three Dancing Girls

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Andrews: Three Dancing Girls

THREE DANCING GIRLS

NIN
ANDREWS

—for Emily Lisker

Every night after dance class, my sisters and I stayed up late, dreaming of the day we'd twirl on toe. We were natural performers, acrobats, ballerinas—all three of us, with long slender arms and legs. Or so we thought as we took turns, showing off our steps in a little circle of light cast by the moon in our attic room. We were so similar in mind and manner and moods back then, and in style and laughter and dance. Even our nail polish was the same color, not to mention our favorite shoes (black heels), our skirts (as swishy as sails), our taste in men (we liked the ones with square heads, though an occasional oval was fine, too). Soon we began to excel in class, and we also began to perform. The mornings after our recitals or shows, which were always followed by receptions, we would talk about the boys we met, our mouths full of laughter and apple flan.

Food was our code for some kind of romantic act, and sometimes for a specific man. A flirtation was Seven-Up or Coke, though Coke was far better than a clear pop and meant something exciting might happen soon. Pretzels and chips were holding hands. Kissing, Oreos. But after a while, we all

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liked the same man. Payday, we called him, after the candy bar with peanuts and chewy caramel, a candy we could never get enough of. I think of him sometimes, his brown curls and freckles, his sneering grin. How he blushed when we teased him, how we kept spinning around and around him, stealing his wallet, his books, his cigarette lighter from the back pocket of his jeans. I remember the last night we danced, all three of us on a single stage in a park with a beautiful arboretum, and when Payday clapped, I felt for a moment we were kin to the birds. But that was the night Payday looped one of my sister's arms in his, and took her outside and did not come back in. The night when I felt the music inside me, the music that had always been a music of all three, suddenly slow and drift and sink to the ground, like a candy wrapper taken by a gust of wind.