

Coroner's Office and Figure Eights

by c.r. avery

My sister was a figure skater
i grew up in rinks
i know their smell well
combination of compressed ice and popcorn
i used to stand on a chair and draw at the counter of the little rink canteen
i could choose one law bidding sweet treat
a croatian chocolate bar
bag of lick your lips salty chips
or crackerjacks with the treasure map inside
and so on and so forth
i'd peek over the counter
talking with the nice lady who sold the candy bars and hot dogs
spending hours deciding what my choice that day would be
while i drew

The competition side of the sport was stressful
the general bad mood if my sister didn't do well
the silence in the car driving home
the catty fights between the skaters
the Shirley Temple manager mothers always at odds
big fish in small pond coaches
and young girls in lots of make-up
that i was told was so
their eyes and cheek bones could be seen from miles away

But i loved the big shows where there were no official rules
no judging
more creative in their carnival ballet on ice routines
it was showbiz baby.

So as i stand on a chair writing this
in the back of my mind debating where to go for \$2.99 breakfast
it's been a long time since i've wandered into a rink
but in between that childhood and now
i've slept in the stairwell of many a fancy hotel
and made a living off of people's moonshine drape curtain desires in the burning forest
and notating the terrified vaudeville romance in the Appalachian trees
smelling the polite red tape piss aroma of the government sanctioned sidewalks
that drowned the heaven scent of wild velvet paintings quilted in bootlegged strip poker
i've been called more than once to come downtown to identify the dead body of a woman we call our city.

"yes it's her"
she was so disfigured
if i hadn't known the woman for so long
she would be unrecognizable
could be any inner city
in any 3rd world country
they pull the sheet over her face
i walk out and into the rain
and down many streets

It seems like the working poor are the ones thinking of the homeless poor
and they're already strapped for the luxury of time
living with their own poor choices

i walk by a river wondering why i moved west
where it doesn't freeze in the life of winter

One of the pictures i drew as a kid at the canteen counter was a woman crying
the lady who sold the candy asked me who she was
i replied
"the city i'll live in as a grown man"
she looked at me strange
but then with a quiet smile.
i didn't have a treat that day
i just held on to my dollar thinking there might be a better place to put my money
i wandered into the cool rink
climbed over the boards
and ran around the ice sliding
falling dekin'
in between prom queen skaters
grabbing the hand of one spinning her around till i fell on my ass
as Van Halen's
"MIGHT AS WELL JUMP!" pumped through the speakers
a coach got me by the ear
led me out of the rink to my mother
who gave me a look like a cop and demanded
"What were you thinking?!"
"It's showbiz MOMMA."
i walked out and into the rain and down many streets
we the people
we the people
in crayon
'neath the crying woman
who still hangs in the rink's small canteen.

