

Friday Night Fights

Growing up, Friday nights were spent
my sister and I, watching
the fights with Daddy. Graceful
choreographed and constrained, the violence
appalled Mom yet the dancing giants
held me. Pipe smoke rose and filled
the room like incense at benediction softening
the blackandwhite forms. The names
Rocky Marciano, Floyd Patterson,
Ingemar Johansson, Sonny Liston, Sugar
Ray flowed like names of saints
from Daddy's lips. The women at ringside
wore furs and makeup, long gloves and low-cut necklines.
Sometimes the sweat and blood would fly and they would turn
their heads. I never did. Mesmerized
by the ritual ferocity, the fearlessness of combat, I watched
for the sweat and blood and the referee
to administer last rites. More
than that, I learned thou shall not hit
below the belt. Thou shall fight fair. How to open
the gash that would blind. How to take a punch. The head fake,
the jab. Left hook right hook upper cut
and body shots. My sister

wasn't in it for the fight, only the food, and after the holy
meal was served in Round 3, smoked clams, gamy
sardines and crackers, she would leave. She should have stayed.
The fancy footwork, the dodge and weave,
how to take a body shot would serve her well
as she goes down again from a left hook
and the sweat and blood fly and
her children turn their heads.