

Compulsory Figures

Bruce Pratt

I tie my granddaughter Isla's
hockey skates, tighten her helmet,
hold her hand til we're on the ice,
begin to skate laps.

In the left faceoff circle
a woman, perhaps fifty,
inhales, rolls her shoulders,
flexes her neck and fingers.

Grey-streaked ponytail,
skates color of clotted cream,
left toe pointed, she pushes off,
entwined with a ghost partner.

She releases his hand, the other,
reunites with his phantom form,
swings away, spoons into him again,
semaphore, muscle memory.

Does she remember his palm
supporting her thighs, buttocks,
or the heat pulsing in his fingers,
as her heart soared in the death spiral?

Eight-year-old Isla asks,
Peper why does that lady do
the same thing every time we skate by?
I say, *So she never forgets.*



Bruce Pratt is an award-winning short story writer, poet, and playwright. He is the author of the novel *The Serpents of Blissfull* from Mountain State Press, the poetry collection *Boreal* from Antrim House Books, the short story collection *The Trash Detail* from New Rivers Press and the chapbook *Forms and Shades* from Clare Songbirds Publishing. His fiction, poetry, drama, and essays have appeared in magazines and journals across the United States and in Canada, Ireland, and Wales. Pratt edits the annual anthology *American Fiction* and is the past director of The Northern Writes New Play Festival. He hosts the weekly Sports Lit 101 segment of the Downtown with Rich Kimball radio show. Pratt lives in Swanville Maine with his wife, Janet.