

Christine Casson

Slip Knot

I.

I sat at my father's feet as he wrapped the twine around his index finger, pulled it taut into a single knot, then cinched it again, before I could read its course, that second knot different from the first, nestled by its side, anchor to a loop that would slide with ease to any size I liked. If he'd been well his eyes, pleased, would have gleamed, for a moment, at my confusion—before his quiet *Look closely, I'll show you again.*

Now, it was an effort to perform this usual task, eyes hard pressed to turn down, to focus on his hands though his fingers like a potter's recalled the routine, so he hardly had to look. He would do it once more, satisfy my compulsion to preserve this simple skill that would be lost like so much else when he was gone though it tired him, all motion deliberate, limbs weighted with his illness, a slow transformation into stone.

II.

The slip knot isn't sound
as its name suggests,
must be used with care
to raise floating objects
fallen overboard, their heft
tightening the knot's grip
easily released,
though in our house
it appeared regularly,
its noose sliding, expanding
or contracting to fit,

pulled close to secure.
My mother, forced to move
when my father died
never fully unpacked:
*What use have I for these?—
I don't entertain—*
would open over time
incidental packages
still sealed with tape,
the vases and bowls
wadded with newspaper,
linens folded in tissue
thin with wear.
Hesitant to part
with her rich cargo,
she'd set them on the floor:
*I'd like you to have this ...
and this ... when I die—
but make for me, would you?—
a few lengths of cord
to keep these boxes
closed while you're away.*
And I turn to the work
at hand, unravel line
into usable lengths,
spin loops
that will suffice, for now,
against the slip of earth,
its silent undertow.

Arrangement

(i.m. Lawrence V. Casson, 1923-1998)

When I was young and heard
 the vinyl record drop, and music lift
 from the lumbering Magnavox

weekend afternoons, watched the needle
 thrum its course through spiraled grooves,
 and you, father,

in your sturdy chair, arms reclining
 on its rests or folded in your lap
 after the long week's work,

I didn't know it was a gift—
 fluid chords and notes engaged
 in polyphonic strands

and your bright face inclined,
 absorbed in shimmered sound,
 your fingers sometimes fluttering

in the living room's soft air
 as over keys you couldn't play
 like wings of nesting birds.

Christine Casson has completed *After the First World*, a manuscript of poems, and is currently working on a study of the poetic sequence titled *Sequence and Time Signature: A Study in Poetic Orchestration*. Most recently her poetry has appeared in *Agenda*, *Natural Bridge*, *Slant*, *South Dakota Review*, *Alabama Literary Review*, in *Fashioned Pleasures* (Parallel Press, 2005), and in *Never Before* (Four Way Books, 2005). She has also published essays on the work of Leslie Marmon Silko and, most recently, on the poetry of Linda Hogan, published in a recent issue of *Agenda*. She is presently Scholar/Writer-in-Residence at Emerson College.