Knots

Lifewriting: A Poet’s Cautionary Tale

one long summer ago

I returned to my father

who was tying knots

in the backyard,

hitches, loops, bends,

never know when

you might need to tie

a knot, he said, like

this fisherman’s bend,

a simple, secure knot

for mooring a boat,

and at day’s end

we drove to Curling

to see my uncle Jim,

and on the way passed

the new Anglican rector,

Ichabod Crane’s twin,

already suspect because

he was tall, skinny, single,

pale, pinched, and Skipper,

with his face twisted

like he had a toothache,

muttered, another faggot,

and I didn’t know what

to say, almost gasped

with the cut of the blood

knot on my bare back,

the noose cutting my throat,

I’d never heard my father

speak with a hornet’s fire,

but also knew I hadn’t heard

him say much for years

since I left home young

and returned seldom,

mostly for meals and money,

too busy with growing up

to hear my father,

and I wondered what

he would say if I told him

my best friend was gay

or my son was gay

or I was gay, but I said

nothing, as usual,

and a few months later,

Skipper phoned, now

the church warden

for the new rector,

chuckled, he’s a good

fellow, but needs me

to look after him,

and I remembered Skipper

in the backyard tying

a figure eight knot even

Houdini could never escape