Knot a Bad Way to Start the Day

The Lanyard
Billy Collins

The other day as I was ricocheting slowly
off the blue walls of this room
bouncing from typewriter to piano
from bookshelf to an envelope lying on the floor,
I found myself in the 'L' section of the dictionary
where my eyes fell upon the word, Lanyard.

No cookie nibbled by a French novelist
could send one more suddenly into the past.
A past where I sat at a workbench
at a camp by a deep Adirondack lake
learning how to braid thin plastic strips into a lanyard.
A gift for my mother.

I had never seen anyone use a lanyard.
Or wear one, if that's what you did with them.
But that did not keep me from crossing strand over strand
again and again until I had made a boxy, red and white lanyard for my mother.

She gave me life and milk from her breasts,
and I gave her a lanyard
She nursed me in many a sick room,
lifted teaspoons of medicine to my lips,
set cold facecloths on my forehead
then led me out into the airy light
and taught me to walk and swim and I in turn presented her with a lanyard.

'Here are thousands of meals' she said,
'and here is clothing and a good education.'
'And here is your lanyard,' I replied,
'which I made with a little help from a counselor.'
'Here is a breathing body and a beating heart,
strong legs, bones and teeth and two clear eyes to read the world.' she whispered.
'And here,' I said, 'is the lanyard I made at camp.'

'And here,' I wish to say to her now,
'is a smaller gift. Not the archaic truth,
that you can never repay your mother,
but the rueful admission that when she took the two-toned lanyard from my hands,
I was as sure as a boy could be
that this useless worthless thing I wove out of boredom
would be enough to make us even.'

BASIC SQUARE STITCH
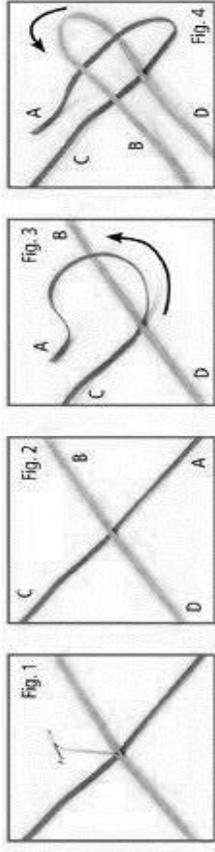

Fig. 1
1. Secure lanyard in place with push pin or tack
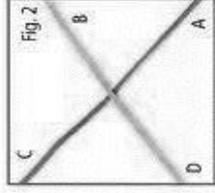
Fig. 2
Use letters above as a guide
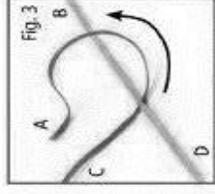
Fig. 3
2. Fold "A" over lanyard "B-D"

Fig. 4
3. Fold "B" over "A"

Fig. 5
4. Fold "C" over "B-D"
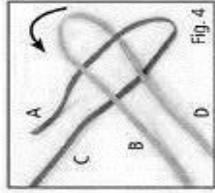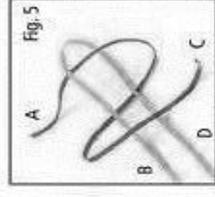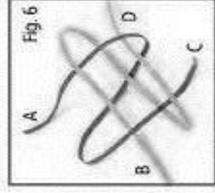
Fig. 6
5. Fold "D" over "C" and under "A"
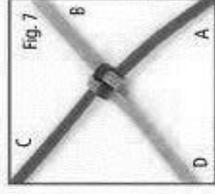
Fig. 7
6. Pull all lanyards evenly to
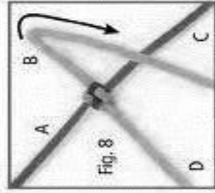
Fig. 8
7. To begin second stitch;

Fig. 9
8. Fold "C" over "B"

Fig. 10
9. Fold "D" over "C-A"
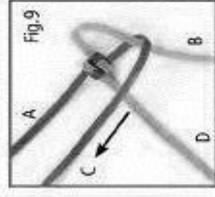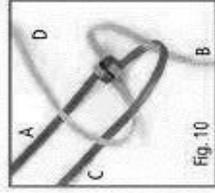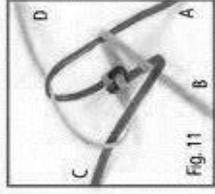
Fig. 11
10. Fold "D" over "C" and under "A"
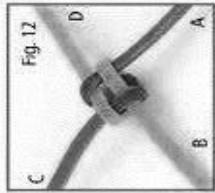
Fig. 12
11. Pull all lanyards evenly to create your second stitch

Fig. 13
12. Repeat steps 1-11