

It comes down, feels the house like a hand.
Your hands would run down my cheeks,
fall from my face like rain.
This is memory. This pure silence.
You learn the most from those
you hardly know: back in the brief
days of that other life, my father
taught me that silence is the longest word.

RIVERS, HORSES AND FIREWOOD

Three cold streams come down
from the mountains. They meet
at the bottom and the river begins,
running west after the sun, running
straight. When the road was built
the old bridges were abandoned and
began to fall and ride the current
like firewood on a gentle horse.

My father sold firewood
across the river when he was ten.
He walked by his horse, running
his hands up and down the reins
and thinking of his mother,
how she stayed home, running
her hands up and down her rosary
as if taking her faith by the reins,
selling her soul to God like firewood.

FABLE

It wasn't that long ago. Hurricanes
with the names of women would cross
the island like packs of wildebeest.
Hurricanes with the names of our dead:

Cecilia, Dolores, Elisa.
We all had a father who turned
cowboy or hunter for a moment, lassoed
the damn things and tossed them back
to the water. We were raised on Disney
cartoons where a twister was solid
and any man with a bit of ingenuity
could rope it to the ground.
Later we learned that celluloid
was extremely flammable and probably
more fragile than time. Disney died.
Our fathers—who were never really brave,
but could always color themselves
into a good cartoon—died. Hurricanes
with the names of our dead also died.
One day we saw a documentary on the wildebeest.
Imagine, said the long dead
to the recently dead. Imagine, said Disney
to my father when he drew a rope
from his hand to the twister.
Then we learned about the wildebeest and nothing
would be calm again, nothing would ever
wait for our lives to pass by. We began
to pity the wildebeest. We held memories
of the island and never again washed
our hands to make the memories last forever.
One day our flammable pasts were gone. They
gave the names of men to hurricanes long
after we left the island. Imagine: the names
of all our dead, our fathers' names crossing
that island, this peninsula. Cartoons,
like memories, are less likely to burn nowadays.
Wildebeests and fathers
still die like hurricanes. From exhaustion.