

Bridge

for Sam Selvon

Samuel Selvon built his bridges with delicate
strips of humour and the romantic wit of love.
Still, what good is a bridge if it obscures
The river beneath? We used to prance

across ignorant of the turbulence below.
There was a divide we never quite fathomed,
we entered strange villages as if we always belonged
in them—perhaps it was youth, perhaps laughter.

But laughter does not come easy any more.
We woke one morning to see the broken bridge,
its entrails hanging over the river
pieces of freshly broken stone plopping

into the sucking water below. The other
village seemed so far away. No one was
laughing. Alas, the man is long dead,
another of our song and dance men

unheralded because his brilliant touch seemed
so common true: “Anybody could tell a story,
man; anybody.” There is blood on our hands.
The smell of reflection is pungent as death.

We file into chapels to remember,
our eyes still caught in the vacuum
of tragic space left between one bank
and the other. We are aging quickly.

I call a litany of the dead artists,
from Mais's fiction to the gross truth
of my father's fall from his imagination
and hope—treacherous steps evaporating to nothing.

I can't do better than retrieve the past
putting on old metaphors and restoring in them
the myth of legacy. Somebody says
to chant a song—we are trying to sing somehow.

These days I stand on the bank and try to laugh,
watching the ribbons of light from my belly
become metaphors of possibility. It is faith
only that makes me whisper, "Thank you, Sam,
thank you."

KWAME DAWES