

Lisette Alonso

A Man's Hands

Of my grandfather, what I remember most clearly are his hands.
Calloused and rope veined, who knows when I last held his hands?

My mother picked out the linen guayabera he wore.
She tucked a carnation between it and the stacked arrangement of his hands.

When his wife died ten months earlier, he was dwarfed by grief.
Putting machete to roots, he was soothed only by the work of his hands.

I imagined his sorrow to be the color of wet earth,
the stain of loss impossible to separate from the spotted skin of his hands.

The avocado tree he gave me casts a long shadow across the yard.
Fruitless again, it was cultivated from a cracked seed by his hands.

How does a man harvest nine decades' worth of suffering,
yet his joys, like polished seeds, fit in the palm of his hands?

"Lisette," my grandfather used to tell me, "never have children,"
advice stirred by a daughter, uttered with his head held in his hands.