

House of Gold

When my father lost his job, we thanked God it wasn't his heart.  
My mother became the greatest philosopher  
*don't worry when there is life there's hope* she'd say  
in the shady stillness of air between teeth & tongue.  
We survived on his gleanings for three years  
before the story took the shape of a tragedy:  
*garri is gold, if you have it thank God*  
*your mates are under the bridge, on the highways you hear?*  
My mother's voice has lost the bird in it & often  
I think this is the first war I get conscripted into.  
Years have rolled past our faces. My father is a rusty silence.  
I can barely recognize him.  
In the morning, we have *garri* & cubes of Louis sugar.  
At noon, my mother gets fried fish on credit  
& breaks them amongst us like Jesus  
though there never were any baskets of remains, no bread,  
we eat it with *garri*.  
We just gather on the balcony & swallow all the silence  
until we're filled with fireflies & sleep.  
In school, I tell the bullies I have a house of gold.  
When they look puzzled, my heart pirouettes  
& when they ask how, I say *garri is gold* & they laugh  
until the urge to run leaves my heart & sticks to my feet.  
My cheeks burn & I remember the last time they burned  
I was holding a spade full of sand over father's lifeless body,  
the priest's voice at the edge of the grave drying away in the sun.