

Bitter

In summer I always got new tennis shoes
rubber soles, thick and white as marshmallows.
I scrubbed them clean every night.
When holes appeared in my Levis,
I crayoned my knees dark blue.
I stole stain remover from the corner pharmacy
to erase all traces of splashed spaghetti.
My mother ruled from the couch in that house
with the tall glass windows that let in so much light.
She fanned her face and swatted at flies
with a Sunset magazine.
We bowed before her open palm,
her spatula and hairbrush.
We hopscotched and tip-toed like thieves
across the carpets
she vacuumed to perfection
in the proper direction of the weave.
On Saturday mornings,
my father bought fresh strawberries and cream.
We'd sit in the backyard eating them.
I can still hear the hollow clink of our metal spoons
as birds drunk on sunshine
or maybe bitter berries
smacked those tall glass windows hard
in our living room.

Strays

In Mexico that October
we sat in the shade
of your Jacaranda tree
and drank ice water.

We fought over
your note books
your cheap watch, your laptop, even that
old shrunken sweater
your sister sent all the way
from Glasgow Scotland.

Through the kitchen window
I watched your widow
lay cold lunch meats on a plate.
I was certain she was thinking
of escape.

The night you died
my brother said flies
bit your face
your neck, your legs
as you walked to the Zocalo
in your straw hat, stopping often
to pet stray dogs.

Curve

My black cat sits on a blue chair
by the kitchen window.
I come home at lunch,
He's still there. I sit next to him.
We share cold chicken.
I like his certainty. His fixed stare.
One dry leaf blowing in the wind
satisfies him.
In my afternoon meeting people talk
about what they talked about
the last time they talked
about something.
I stare beyond the graphs
of where we are at
and where we hope to be
to a perfect blue sky
and the jet soaring past
imperceptibly.

This River

The river

 it'll takes those trees
all that trash
 hell shopping carts
 come unstuck
 dead bodies you name it
 to the ocean
Dumps muck in my basement
 every year
 was a bank right there
yesterday. River now.

Should we get sandbags?
 Is that what people do?

Could

 We watched the river rising
 People were so nice
up here Cars slow to let you walk
 We watched the river rising
 it was brown no longer blue
 it lapped around a house.

it would take it too

I Want a Day

I want a day that floats down at sunrise
like a newly washed sheet, landing
corner to corner, the smell of far away
leaves and long stalks of grass. I want
a day that comes screaming in with
sticky fingers, chasing butterflies not
wondering why or what or when. I
want a day that slides down the wall
and sits in the shade with the cat
who sniffs at the wind and waits
for the wild rustling of rats.