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.