

The Essex

The sour air tastes like diseased wine,
a rusty blade. It has teeth.

On the sidewalk whores in hell's heels
fondle boys through car windows,
purr and promise to age them
in dog years.

Businessmen stop for twenty minutes.
They peel Franklins,
mount stairs and sluts.
Leave armed with lies.

The shabby rooms are booked.

Everyone has an angle.
Everyone sweats.

The morning extra will be thick.

Overhead, above the dangerous
words and smells and motion,
a knife-shaped cloud hangs still
like an idea.

Even the sky is up to no good.

...

Lady of Sorrow

That first moment I stepped
from the bus at Mazatlan
and saw you as I bent
to the trough to wet my face,
Mexican heat rising from you
like fog, white cotton stuck
to your breasts with sweat
as you dipped your laundry
and wrung it dry, the power
of your beauty and quiet pride
of your place pricked me
like the cactus rose that grew
beside you. Sweet lady

of sorrow, your silent eyes
moved me to touch you.
Your absent whispers asked me
to slide across your skin.
The depth of your waters
defined my first decline
into your brook and flesh,
your soul. You wrapped me

in the voices of your silence
and their quiet screaming, blankets
for the confines of my cave.
The oils of your darkness lit my
way with midnight shining, torches

like those that led the two children
that last night of Las Posadas as we
watched, through the bougainvillea
of your bedroom window, slender
candles follow Mary and Joseph
to the manger and listened, as we
kissed, to the Christ child lulled

to sleep by El Rorro, his cradle
song. I found religion there,

in the gospel of your eyes
and silence, in the tangles
of your hair and river bottom,
those echoes of Mexico that cry
inside me still. I found

god,
in that missing light
that should have glowed from you
that first day in Mazatlan.

- Patrick Carrington