

After the Monsoons

Early morning
market sellers float a table of their wares
on old truck tyres
then push through flooded streets,
crying 'Rice for refill!'
'New fruit!'
'Dry spices!'
Calcutta's unofficial merchant navy.

Rickshaw men
exhausted from pedalling
against the backed up floods
languish under a downpipe
and soap themselves
with yellow detergent
—they haven't stopped washing all month.
Each skin is delighted
by the charisma of shower water,
pleasure
from their inability to dissolve.

Only my father refuses to forgive this season
wading home impervious
to the dun water
lapping his knees

Confident to hide the ripples
in his clerk's suit
black pressed and buttoned
he clasps a furled umbrella
just above the water

and as he rises to our door
watercress moss soddens his pants.
His one concession comes later
over dinner

'I must believe that canals and dams
will be the saviour of this country.'

Richard Pearshouse