

To Be with You

Isabela Banzon¹
University of the Philippines

To be with you is to go where the sun is setting.

*El sol va declinando,*²
someone is saying.
I hear my name caught in a sudden wind.

Beside me, a typhoon
and yet it is not the monsoon season.

I am listening to the crickets somewhere in the trees
and the sun as it sets where you are.

Cloudless the sky and bright are blooms in May
like you.

You would have said it simply.
Happy and sad are we.

Someone is threatening rain.
Dark the hills and darker the grass.

You would have said,
when did it matter, the weather?

Gone is summer and numbered the seasons.

We lie in an open field and the sky fills up with clouds.
It is how we knew it would.

Far away, someone is saying,
*Todo pasa y todo queda.*³

Cruel and kind are clouds.
All passes and all remains.

² "The sun is setting," from Antonio Machado's poem "A orillas del Duero."

³ "All passes and all remains," from Antonio Machado's poem "Todo pasa y todo queda."

Dear Mr. Thumboo

I am curious about the chempaka in your poem
“Throes.” Is your chempaka my champaka? I
refer to the glossary for clarification: “frangipani
usually found in graveyards.” Flowers for the dead.
I read your poem over to get it right: her “last
look, that silent cry/ Stays in the sap of my daily eye.”

It is my mother, not your mother, who by “the fall
of hair,” “the quick scratch of hair-pin,” is about
to leave me. What remains of her is a photograph
above the casket – a woman in bloom and the scent
of champaka held by a pin to her hair. Is this
what you meant by the “chempaka scent be ours alone?”

Where I come from, the champaka is like
the ilang-ilang, the frangipani is the calachuchi;
but I suppose, they aren’t important, these
distinctions. Violets, roses, any flower will do—
for in whatever language, flowers “give the leveling
sun more dew,” tell of a loss, our life passing.

¹Isabela Banzon teaches creative writing (poetry) and Philippine literature in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, University of the Philippines. She sits on the editorial board of the university’s *Journal of English Studies and Comparative Literature*. She has given readings of her poems in countries including Indonesia, Singapore and Spain.