

# ***Sun Country***

Arlene Yandug

## ***June***

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This is June's dominion:  
the light flooding the asphalt,  
the green marching on the fields,  
our buses speeding brightly  
on the highway.  
There's spring to our steps.  
On the roadside,  
farmers walk purposely  
to the field;  
children shake flowers and  
trees and June bugs fall  
with the dewdrops.  
The palms in the distance  
wave, postcard still.  
In June, the mind travels  
light, vast as the sky  
yet light as pollen.

## ***Finding the 58<sup>th</sup> body***

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“Reynaldo Momay’s daughter still has no body to prove her father was the 58th victim [of the Maguindanao massacre]. Her evidence is both scant and horrifying: his denture dug from a mass grave.”  
Nov 22, 2010, *The Pinoy Connection* (Online News)

No one buries a smile or  
its skeleton.

    The hard ground  
is someone’s conscience  
she wishes to break  
and loosen clod by clod.  
Until a finger, a forearm,  
the dark cave of a mouth  
comes to light.

    O, the light there’s  
    something  
sad about the light.

    The sun is always  
    traveling,  
fleeing into the shadows  
of trees until the earth  
forgets, resumes its silence.

No one goes  
to the hill anymore  
where the grass knows  
something.

The soil finally closes up  
under the thickening grass  
where a bright blue corposant  
flits from blade to blade  
from tree to tree  
from mind to mind  
where a backhoe  
continues to dig  
dig dig

## ***Names***

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Bless all  
that cannot be spoken.  
The ring of gold  
around the moon  
has no existence outside  
yourself. Give it a name.  
Name the soft tight  
core in a rose,  
the sudden bright red  
feather of a sparrow  
dark as evening.

Inside a name is a brimming  
spoon of milk.

Recall how it felt  
to live without a name.  
A blank sky, a field of red.

Name all sadness  
there is, so you live  
a life you can endure,  
even love.

Recall how it felt to have  
a name. A flock of birds  
darkens the sky.  
A slight breeze, just enough  
to bend the roses  
on their stems.

## ***Letter from Sun Country, 1903***

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“... The funny part of it is that I feel as much at home here as though I had always lived in this place and have felt so ever since I landed.”

—*Russel Suter, an American engineer who served as provincial supervisor in northeastern Mindanao in the early twentieth century.*

From foot-long cigars,  
lazy funnels of smoke.  
Conversations  
consist of throwing  
half-meant compliments  
at each other  
over a bowl of soup,  
each in his own tongue,  
taking off hats,  
making deep bows.

I suspect you're all  
chilly now  
at your side of the world.  
No ice in this land of hemp,  
rice, cane, and nuts.

Sun  
everywhere. And gold.  
Gold is a curse here:  
men and women carrying  
coco shells  
pan out gold about  
fifty cents a day. Then  
retreat peacefully  
into their dreams, leaving  
the fields untilled  
for the rest of the year.

This is a country of poetry,  
the sight of insects  
inspires random lines.  
They have spiders and  
ants of all colors.  
I hunt white ants, making  
sure they won't eat  
the whole house down.

The Supt. of School, Mr. Jones  
had to learn Spanish  
to be able to cuss  
at his messenger.  
His wife left yesterday  
afternoon, couldn't stand  
the size of roaches,  
the lizards on the walls,  
on the ceiling, on the table,  
waiting to steal  
a morsel of rice.

Yesterday, another American  
was killed. Thirty-six  
bolo wounds. Nobody  
dared retrieve him but  
the town priest went out  
and picked the body today.

How does a country take  
possession of a country?  
Plant a flag? Draw a sword  
or a crowbar? Announce  
to the sky, this spot of earth  
belongs to us?

Sometimes, it rains at high noon –  
a pump out of a clear sky – then stops.  
Everything that can rust  
does so, even the clouds  
are stained.  
This is a country of slow  
dreams  
and we're prisoners  
mooning around  
in this beautiful enclosure.

After lunch, in the sudden  
cool, we're expected  
to withdraw into the cool  
sleeves of noon,  
where the mind drifts,  
drifts like funnels of smoke,  
from foot-long cigars.

# Dugso

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*performed on stage*

They tremble  
like rainbow drops  
around her neck,  
those pendent beads.

No one knows  
she's calling the birds,  
all those plumes  
nobody sees.

Here, the light  
engulfs her while  
faraway, women  
thrum the strings  
and men beat  
the gongs to life.  
They're somewhere  
near the forest's  
edge, dancing around  
the fire under  
the rimless skies.

Here, the light is  
bright but smokeless.  
Can't waft her prayers  
to the mountain  
gods even as she  
flaps her sleeves  
like broken wings,  
her feet stomping  
against the floor,  
dreaming roots,  
the tickle of  
grass and dust.

When the rhythm  
fades, she squints  
in the bright flashes;  
shields her face

with her hands, thinking  
of softer lights  
back home, pendants  
silvering the sky.