

## STUDYING SYMBIOSIS IN THE FORESTS OF SINGAPORE

Thinking of you tonight, that you might leave, I remain awake.  
A wind full of ice chills my bones.

Last week I took my students to the tropical forest.  
There, exotics thrive with natives in textbook harmony.  
Pararubber trees, whose great grandparents stood in Brazil  
Shade the ginger, just raising its bloom through the littered floor.  
Local ants carry the black seeds of acacia from Torres.  
Birds pluck them hanging from lovely orange threads,  
And then go eat figs.  
Mimosa, timid and bold, invades and blushes.  
We called it shut-thighs and shame-old-lady, in other lives.  
The bees don't seem to mind.  
Mynas and tilapia colonize;  
They are like us and our kind and do well.

Take the strange case of the rubber tree,  
Who forsook insignificance deep within the neotropical jungle,  
And chose the road and the wires.  
We were convinced to disperse it and care for it.  
Now we are insulated and carried and addicted.  
By whose invention, whose design, whose idea?

My students drew maps of where they had not been.  
They did not know the way home except by breadcrumbs and briarpatches.  
We laughed and marveled at a hundred and twenty different maps  
Of the same place, the same history.  
The diversity of our memory is a puzzle as rich as the forest  
That will be no more.

Tomorrow my students will clone tapioca collected from the place.  
Maybe we will harvest the leaves after a while and make saki tamboi.  
Then perhaps we can really acquire  
The genes, and memories, and molecules  
Of America, and Africa, and Asia,  
And then we'll call the teaching a true success.

I am still awake and only ask,  
"How is it that I came all this way, through all these centuries,  
To find you here, to find you gone?"  
Obligate extinction, extinguished by obligation.  
What shall I do?  
What map will you leave me?  
What legend should I follow?  
What pollen can I taste?