

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Aileen Cassinetta: Two Poems

Aileen Cassinetta · Monday, September 19th, 2022

Martial Law Babies

— for all those who were children during Martial Law in the Philippines, September 21, 1972 – January 17, 1981

Ask me what it means to be island-bred
I will tell you how we used to travel

For hours on a bus to feel sand
Beneath us, pinked with bodies of dead

Coral and mollusk, traces of saltwater
Oyster. How unfancy we were, making

Bubbles from pink hibiscus flowers
How the other best part of the day was

Sweetest pink shaved ice topped with milk powder
Monsooned and gorged, we always meant to give

More than we took. But I don't speak for everyone
I am someday and halfway, tell me

How to return to you unyearned
On a bus, unfettered, pink-lanterned.

**First published in the anthology, 100 Pink Poems Para kay Leni (San Anselmo Press, 2022)*

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To want the wide American earth

— after Carlos Bulosan

In my mouth is a country of longing
The bittersweet of border crossings

Some words don't come easy—scarce, scars
English is a language of leaving

a lexicon of who invaded
and what they left behind. I taste

what passes for shrimp paste, build a life
around shifts and routes. First train leaves

before first light, the last one before
midnight. Transport me with the sight

of filtered light. In my mouth is a country
of bittersweet crossings. Say namamahay

in English in the only space I will
ever occupy: this expanse of longing.

**An audio recording of this poem was aired on [KALW Public Radio](#) on July 4, 2022.*

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