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To the Philippines

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To the Philippines

By: Ronie Rafael Altejar

You clothed me when I was naked and yellow, reaching for light from the womb, pulling up your cloud-laced blouse to drench me with rays leaking from the fever of your motherly breast. You wed the oceans between your island arms that cradled me and my two halves, the Castillo's and the Altejar's, the farmers and the street vendors. You punished us, seeing that we melted on our bamboo beds, catching sweat in our teeth in houses with hot floors, thatched roofs, weak locked-doors. You didn't want me to stay where hunger meant settling for dust in our rice, and Christmases were hand-me-down

plastic toys. If only you asked, I would have told mama and papa to stay that it was all ok, all ok because I loved running barefoot even if glass cut my feet, sharing a bed with no blankets, suckling from your diesel cloud sky. If you had let me stay you'd be feeding me grains of white rice, you'd be repainting the tan on my skin, you'd be the land where the ache of waking felt cozy, worn-out and familiar. But I obeyed and left you behind like the diapers I've overgrown, memories I keep tucked in shadow, unpaved dirt roads that flood in the rain which will never kiss these soles. In abandon, I am clothed with white tags, your child, now a branded "Product of the U.S.A."