



Roseville N. Nidea

## Returning to the Ruined House

They told me not to come back –  
that nothing remained but vines  
and what the water had spared.

But my heart has its own hunger,  
and a certain ache never fully unpacks its bags.

So, I came.

The path had narrowed,  
the green unfamiliar,  
only leafhoppers tracing thin lines  
between shards and dust.

I found it  
by what wasn't there:  
the curve of the ground  
where a guava tree once leaned,



This work is licensed under a [Deed - Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International - Creative Commons](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

a patch of cracked cement  
where Lola's boiling pot sang steam songs.

What's left of the house  
could fit in a single photograph –  
a corner post leaning like an old man,  
a fractured tile,  
a spoon rusted into the earth.

The rest?

Leaf settling.  
Absence holding.

A butterfly landed on my wrist.  
I almost called out,  
as if someone might still answer,  
as if the walls might clear their throat  
and say,  
*Ah, you're back.*  
*Took you long enough.*  
I touched the ground  
where boiling once sang.

I traced the silence beneath my hand,  
as if warmth still lingered there.  
A voice inside whispered:  
*You do not need the roof*  
*to know it was home.*

So, I sat.

Outlined a window in the air.  
I sang a song no one taught me,  
but which the wind seemed to recognise.

And when I left,  
I did not take anything.  
Not even a stone.  
I had already gathered  
what I came for –  
the ache  
of being remembered  
in the scent of guava leaves,  
the pulse of a place  
that no longer waits.

**Note from the Poet**

*Returning to the Ruined House* is about walking through the space in my mind and letting memory guide me. I started by thinking about how landscapes hold traces of the past and how absence can carry meaning. From there, I began to see the ruined house as a text to be read: the guava tree, though no longer standing, became a symbol of childhood and domestic life; the corner post leaning like an old man spoke to fragility, time, and lineage; and the rusted spoon in the earth suggested how human presence is absorbed and transformed by nature. Even small signs - the leafhoppers tracing thin lines, the butterfly landing on the wrist, and the scent of guava leaves emerged naturally as communicative agents, carrying nostalgia, recognition, and emotional resonance. As I wrote this poem, I imagined the environment as an active participant, not just a backdrop, with its own rhythm and history, rewriting the space while holding traces of what was once human. I was moving between sensory observation, memory, and imagination, to capture a co-authorship between human feeling and ecology, showing how absence, decay, and regrowth all carry meaning, and how even when a home no longer waits, the land remembers.

## The Cracks in Our Prayers

Dust drifts where incense once rose.  
A fissure splits the marble Christ —  
from heel to heart,  
the crack widening with each aftershock.

Candles lean toward the floor,  
their wax pooling  
like melted offerings.

The saints have shifted  
in their wooden frames,  
faces turned away from the nave  
as if listening to another prayer.

A rosary hangs  
from a splintered nail.  
The beads shiver  
each time the earth shudders.

Light enters through the roof,  
thin and uncertain —  
a pale breath  
touching the altar cloth.

A woman gathers glass shards  
into her skirt's hem,  
her palms faintly bleeding.

No one speaks.  
The bell rings once more,  
a sound that does not return.

In the half-light,  
a hand rises,  
tracing the sign of the cross  
in air thick with dust –  
not from belief,  
but from remembering how.

## What the Map Could Not Mark

They built a road through the rice fields —  
a straight line, clean as forgetting.  
The carabao's path was erased first,  
then the shade where elders once played *sungka*  
on cracked wood, dust rising like incense.

They said it would bring progress.  
We nodded, tired.  
Who were we to argue with concrete  
that did not flinch?

But the map never marked  
where we buried the placenta.  
Or where Lolo used to stand at dusk  
to ready his *nganga*, tapping lime  
into a betel leaf — folded, careful,  
like a letter never sent.

No one traced the scent of *waling-waling*  
when it bloomed after the typhoon.  
No one remembered the names of the birds  
we no longer hear at noon.

A boy now rides his bike  
past where the well once stood.  
His tires cut through memory  
like it was just another trail.

But one day, he will ask –  
why the air changes  
near the bend.

Why the wind carries  
a word he never learned.

And maybe he will stop.  
Maybe he will listen.  
Maybe he will remember  
something he was never told.

## The River That Remembers

We bathed in the Kamagong River,  
where the current carried stories  
we never spoke beneath the old Spanish bridge.  
Lola once told us the river could cleanse –  
without taking anything from us.

We cupped water in our palms,  
poured it over our heads –  
a blessing we hadn't known we needed.  
Fish darted between our ankles,  
carrying old stories tangled in their fins.

She said the river could read us –  
that it remembered each footfall,  
each scrape of skin against the stone.  
It would know, even before we did,  
which of us would return to the barrio,  
to the river, to the bridge.

I tried to dry off –  
shake loose the chill,  
the earthiness of ferns.  
But even days later,  
my skin carried traces of the water –  
and when the wind came from the east,  
I could almost hear  
the river calling my name –  
a summon or a farewell –  
I am not ready to answer.

## In the Clearing Where No Road Reached

In the clearing where no road reached,  
the Herb Woman scraped bark  
from the Kaliñgag –  
its scent sharper than memory.

*Para sa lagnat*, she said,  
but I wondered if it healed  
other fevers, too –  
like longing.

At night, the scent lingered  
on our hands  
like a story  
we hadn't finished telling.

She never asked their names.  
The sick came with stories  
they wouldn't tell,  
their hands fever-warm  
with wanting.

In the clearing no road ever reached,  
the Herb Woman scraped bark  
from the Kaliñgag –  
slowly, carefully,  
like lifting  
a story from skin.

It was not just the fever she listened to.  
There were older illnesses —  
a departure that never became home  
a hunger that wore a mother's voice.

They always asked,  
Will it work?  
as if healing were a promise  
she could keep.

She placed the bark in their palms,  
watched how they carried it home.  
Like memory.  
Like prayer.  
Like a child  
still believing in the cure.

**Bionote**

**Roseville N. Nidea** is a poet, writer, independent researcher, and environmental advocate from Albay, the Philippines. Her work explores ecological change, ancestral memory, and disaster in Bikol communities. She curates localised ecopoetry and has been developing the *Anthology of Bikol Ecopoetry* for several years now, a grassroots project confronted with challenges of multilingualism, representation, and environmental urgency in a region of beauty and degradation.