

Small and Beautiful Acts of Rebellion

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A father who stays. A mother who gives.

A son who names what is broken. A daughter who believes it can change.

Carabao was developed through Mayworks Festival's Labour Arts Catalyst in collaboration with Anakbayan Toronto, a space where artists and organizers come together to think through labour, migration, and collective struggle. The play draws from the 2025 Nexperia workers' strike in the Philippines, where over a thousand workers walked out in response to layoffs, union suppression, and wages that had not kept pace with the value they were producing.

Workers who had given decades to the company were facing increasing precarity, even as the factory generated millions in daily output. What began as a vote became a collective refusal: to accept worsening conditions, to remain silent, and to be divided. Workers held the line, sleeping on factory floors and organizing supplies as access to food, water, and electricity was restricted. The strike was not only about wages, but about dignity, the right to organize, and the insistence that labour could not be separated from the lives built around it. It ended in victory because workers acted together and refused to let go of one another. The play also takes up migration and more specifically, oppressive migrant labour policies in Canada.

Roann Enriquez writes from within that world. Her work reflects a lived understanding of what it means to be connected across borders and shaped by shared conditions. I have come to know Roann through overlapping Filipino arts and community spaces in Toronto, where these stories are not abstract, but part of everyday life.

Like many families, mine left the Philippines in search of something “better”. The language of opportunity makes that decision feel necessary. But the reality is more complicated: migration brings distance, and over time that distance becomes ordinary. It also brings a quieter cost: a loneliness that settles in, even as a new life is built, shaping how you understand home. For me, the cost was a numbing of what it feels like to be a part of something bigger than myself. I understood it to mean independence, I know now that it was isolation. Instead of losing my connection to my family and home, I made an active choice to resist it.

Change rarely arrives all at once. More often, it accumulates, built from small decisions repeated over time, until something that once felt immovable begins to shift.

Many of us are not on picket lines. We are not sleeping on factory floors or negotiating contracts with management. Many of us are simply trying to get through the day. And yet, what we have just witnessed in Roann’s play lingers because it is not distant.

We recognize the father who has given most of his life to a company that cannot promise him stability, the mother working oceans away while carrying more than her role will ever acknowledge, the son searching for something better elsewhere, and the daughter who refuses to look away. These are not extraordinary people. They are people navigating conditions that ask too much and return too little. They are us.

If there is a role for us, it may not be to lead revolutions, but to participate in them through everyday, sustained actions. The question becomes what it means to practice creative, beautiful acts of rebellion.

One place to begin is showing up, not because it is easy, but because it is necessary. We see this in a worker who is tired and uncertain, and still chooses to stand on the picket line, and in the decision to remain when the outcome is unclear. This kind of presence is not dramatic. It is quiet and repetitive. It is the choice to remain with others, again and again.

We are taught, often subtly, to survive alone, to push through, to ask for less, and to rely on no one. But the play makes clear that survival is collective. A family stretched across continents is not independence, but interdependence under strain. Money is sent home, calls are made across time zones, and truths are softened so that worry does not travel as quickly as hardship. This is survival through each other.

Much of what sustains life is invisible. Care work, emotional labour, and endurance often go unseen. They are embedded in routines and habits, in the ways people show up for one another without praise or reward. There are moments when support is as simple as naming what is happening. To say, I see you, or I know this is difficult, interrupts the silence that surrounds labour and care. Recognition reminds people they are not alone, and that is what allows them to remain.

We are shaped by stories about what is possible: that hard work will be rewarded, that leaving guarantees a better life, that staying quiet will keep us safe. These stories fracture when we look closely. The play shows us labour without security, migration without protection, and, in Canada, a system where many migrant workers are tied to a single employer through closed permits, meaning their right to stay in the country is tied to that job, making it difficult to leave unsafe or exploitative conditions without risking their livelihood.

Telling the truth, in the face of a dominant narrative, even when it creates tension, is an important act of rebellion: a daughter warns her brother about what he is walking into, and a worker names unfair conditions, even when it leads nowhere immediately. These moments create friction, but they are necessary. To speak clearly about what is happening is to resist the stories that keep things as they are.

But truth does not move on its own. In the play, it is carried through organizing, through groups like Anakbayan, where people gather, study, and act together. What may appear as individual courage is collective work, planned and built over time.

Courage rarely appears dramatic. More often, it is quiet. It looks like standing beside someone so they are not alone, backing them up in a conversation, or offering concern even in disagreement. These gestures do not change conditions immediately, but they change how those conditions are endured.

Not everyone can take the same risks, there are those who step forward, who strike, who organize, and who speak despite the consequences, and these actions are sustained by the networks around them, and the small acts by the people connected.

Even within struggle, there must be moments of renewal. A shared meal, a joke, or a brief moment to be with each other. These are part of what makes the work possible. In the Philippines, there is a word, *salosalo*, which describes gathering and sharing what is available. It reflects a simple truth: a community must work together to continue.

It is easy to feel that none of this is enough. An act of care can feel insignificant against systems that appear vast and unmoving. But nothing large begins large. A strike is built from individuals deciding, one by one, to stand together, and a movement is built through relationships that hold under pressure. Large comes later. We begin where we are.

We return to Roann's work, and to the family at its centre. In this work, I see my own family: our decision to leave the Philippines in search of survival, the distance that becomes the norm, and the loneliness that is rarely named but ever present. Still, we continue to support each other against the odds.

They may be through seemingly mundane actions, but they are also the foundation of how we survive. If there is a revolution to speak of, it begins here, in these acts of care, repeated over time, and in the ways we refuse to lose each other.

"I'm working hard too. So you won't have to be tired anymore."

Carabao by Roann Enriquez was developed as a part of Mayworks Festival of Working People & the Arts' Labour Arts Catalyst (LAC) with Anakbayan Toronto and informed by research interviews conducted with Migrante Ontario.



Presented in collaboration with Tarragon Theatre as a play reading on May 8-9, 2026.

Playwright: Roann Enriquez

Director: Chantelle Han

Cast: Jonas Hong, Carolyn Fe, Kryslyne-Mai Ancheta, Adriano Sobretudo Jr.

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