Hilda Twongyeirwe

In conversation

Here I stand, Robben,
hugged by wild winds of Devil’s Peak,
wondering; Mandela,
what held your centre together in that bottomless pit,
you and others that survived it all

amongst,
lunacy
leprosy
criminal
outcast
spirits?

My eyes follow the water,
black.
Deceptive with calm,
heavy.
Burdened with ocean memories,
deep

Speak spirits I beg of you.
Let your words float on these winds and let me,
hear of your great history 400 years back.
of entangled pasts of,
national boundaries and global boundary-less nationals.

Decode your Robben language,
so I may interpret your secret gestures,
the shake of heads,
wave of hands,
wink of eyes,
that connected you earthwards.

Speak,
Spirits
I await
Your tale,
Patient.

I see you now.
I see you,
racing outward,
tucked inside sea-shells that littered the shoreline after each tide.
Filling each crevasse, each nook,
weaving underground bridges and highways like safari ants after heavy rains.

Now I see
I can see that when you were locked up, your spirits fled.
They soon learnt to swim,
to roam oceans at ease.
To traverse earth without passports,
To escape red-eyed warders wading the island.

They flew sky-high
sowing seeds
of solidarity,
affirmation,
of a past reclaimed,
of generations unburied.

They sowed seeds of a future recreated.
And you Robben,
you became a boardroom,
writing history.

**Breaking Order**

In Cairo the word order rules
Sheep and horses and pyramidal oranges
Mingling but minding speeding taxis
Keeping an eye on possible customers
Scrutinising which is which
In the face of stiff competition.

Nearby, gardens sit stiff like women in Burqa
Ensuring their beans do not trespass
Do not shed leaves in neighbouring gardens so close
Buildings standing back to back, neck to neck
Touching yet not touching
Racing souls within.

Violet my friend stands motionless
She is fascinated, charmed
She wants to touch and behold colours of Cairo
To smell and caress and belong
And lol!
A statue across the road beckons.

It is a musical guitarist of ages
Treacherous sinews stroking strings
Her legs fail to stand still
She lets them, step by step to relish the relic
Till a deep voice restores order
“That’s dangerous; can’t you see that is a man?”

Yet,
Inside rooms, two birds face each other in an artistic gesture
Their souls touch with lips
Enchanted by a red rose in between
Breaking rules of order
In the painter’s brush.