

Cape Point

From Atlantis (2017)

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translation Kelsi D. Vanada

You see the face of a house sharply sketched.

Near the harbor.

On the street you turn into.

A light over the façade.

Like a flash that's taken.

A photograph.

You start to cross the street.

Toward the other sidewalk.

But only make it halfway.

Two men come rushing toward you. Shouting.

Quickly searching your body. Take the phone from your back pocket.

Lift the camera from your shoulder.

Drop the charger.

Run off.

You pick it up.

See a man sitting in a car.

You beat the cord hard against a streetlamp.

Walk up the stairs.

See the sun over the Indian Ocean.

The construction on the left hill.

An outermost point.

Huge noise from the harbor.

Cars.

If it is the ocean that is heard.

All night.

The scene in your head.

The speed.

Fear.

Every theft is a theft of love.

A beach.

The Indian Ocean.

The harbor facing Goa.

The struggle with the Arabs. Portuguese. Englishmen.

Mandela's name.

The sixty-seven years he served his country.

If you could see a single white person

push the shopping carts through the parking lot.

Work.

The sound of the construction.

Sirens.

You don't like the heat. Not the light.

Haze over the ocean. The body. Its vulnerability. The refusal inside it.

A chasm. The steepness.

The brown people she says.

Take public transports.

You swerve out of the way when they go by she says and laughs.

The first day.

An outermost point.

Light falls over it.

The horn. The east and the west side.

You always panic he says.

No.

Not always.

Panicking you answer.

The haze over the ocean has let up.

Big cargo ships. A railway.

Rusty freight cars.

The sun sets earlier.

It gets chilly quick.

A blue light from the ocean. A bay.

You hear car doors shutting again. A dog barking.

My words are like fire.

Morning over the Indian Ocean.

Why me.

The wind is blowing. Hard.

Sugar something.

Dawn arrives.

You slept in his deep sleep.

The wind is strong.

Some cargo ships move across the sea.

Why do you stress yourself.

The skin. Its scent.

Afternoon. Already.

Sugar something.

Or the time that comes after a long morning.

You laid down on the couch.

Watched the dawn.

Brewed coffee. Gave him some.

The ribs.

As if broken.

The injury reopened.

How can you fuck all the time he says.

Gets up. Grabs for his clothes.

Reaches for your hip.

You fuck with my head.

They understand you better than me you say.

You call them.

Whiteness is not a language.

You see a black man on a fire escape.

Domestic workers. Colored. Not belonging he says.

Sugar something.

You know what I mean.

The sugar road. Not just that of the diamonds.

A foghorn is heard in the dark morning.

There were poor people before you were born.

And there will be poor people after you've died.

The lit-up freight boats anchored. The outermost point. Stanley Street.

His scent on your skin.

The shock when you walk into the room and see him in his undershirt.

They were paid in wine he says. Alcohol. Everyone is an alcoholic.

You took a taxi while darkness still lay over the city.

Sat at the bus station and talked.

The others who were waiting finally stopped staring.

Mixed they said when you came into the restaurant.

He didn't hear it.

Everything you later said arose from your shame about the system.

Whose laws were written at a university he pointed out when you rode by.

They didn't even speak to me.

You fell asleep. Woke up.

In the bus through the landscape.

Saw it change. The greenness.

Rainforest. Mountains.

Like in Nigeria he says.

Plains. Mountains.

Grazing sheep.

In the sunlight they look like lions.

When the police stop the bus and ask him for his I.D.

He looks away. Delays answering.

We'll be back they say and start at the back of the bus.

They will never ask you.

He almost spits out.

Because you are white.

But they do.

Just as aggressively.

Thanks for telling me you say.

When they say they're doing it for your own good.

We have to change that narrative he says to

the man across the aisle.

That all of us from Nigeria steal.

We are two hundred million.

Most are hardworking.

You have the desire to rest your head against his shoulder.

But don't follow it.

If you put a with there it becomes something else.

The broken rib.

Fuck with.

Your question makes him so furious he falls silent.

Racial injustice. Not economic injustice.

A house is burning near Cape Town.

The fire department doesn't come.

They have to put out the fire themselves he says.

If not the whole area will burn down.

White supremacists.

Fog over the city.

Still dark. Cold. Skyscrapers. Long Street.

Fields of distrust. Drugs. Hookers.

You doze off. Against the window.

Somehow. Did I sleep well.

How are you.

Too chaotic.

Three men sit and speak in Afrikaans at the table. On the balcony.

You see the fog.

The mountain.

The street below.

Fire that glows. Burning.

The men watch you as you go in and out.

Morning says the man with a patch on his eye when they get up.

Whale Street.

All signs in Afrikaans.

Why do you call out the numbers in Afrikaans the woman in line said when no one reacted at number ninety.

I don't understand she said.

The woman at the counter looked at you to back her up.

What did you do with that gaze.

Don't know.

I-don't-know.

He laughs at you.

Names you.

They all moved here when apartheid fell he says.

Brought all their riches with them.

Joburg where the government is located. ANC.

They didn't want to be close.

Morning.

A dry cleaner's on the other side of the street is already open.

The moment you say.

You stroke the sole of his foot.

Leafing through the book.

Sorry for disturbing you.

Come to Nigeria.

A trail that forks.

A trail that opens.

To be swallowed by the road.

A Yoruba belief.

Now you have to take a shower again.

No. I like your smell.

Interesting he replies.

You see the opening in the harbor toward Robben Island.

When you come out of the museum fog is covering the whole area.

The South Pole is closest in kilometers a sign says.

You long for his smell.

You turn around.

But your stomach pain comes back along the way.

If it is the outermost point.

That apartheid was formed in 1948.

How could it be moved.

Did they move here.

Anne Frank's story is displayed at the museum.

Which has no visitors except for you.

The tickets to the ferry are sold out.

You get back in line.

But change your mind when you hear an American exchange

his reservation for a ticket.

Black tourism. Dark.

You don't remember what it's called.

His laughter. That you wanted to live inside. You got to live inside.

Aimed at you.

Bob Marley. He was the best.

Says a man in Green Market Square.

No man no cry.

Why have none of us women in the whole world written that song you wonder.

You are my first customer she says.

I'll give it to you for three hundred.

You meet him on the street.

Suddenly he's walking down Long Street.

In his black jacket.

He just stops.

Stands still. Says nothing.

Reproaching. Reproach. Worry.

They said that you took a map and went out.

You asked them?

Do you know how long you've been gone he says.

Five hours.

You think it's seven.

You don't say it.

Stroke his arm.

Take his hand.

His little finger with yours.

I'm going to change some money he says.

They have a black market exchange at a hair salon across from a hotel.

Go to Western Union says the man when you've entered

the innermost room.

It's because I'm from Nigeria he says when you walk out.

Or it's because you're with a white woman you say.

He laughs.

Conformists he says. Of his generation.

I'm not stupid.

I hear you.

No. You're not stupid.

Spices and silk she says.

Diamonds. Gold. She doesn't say.

I throw you.

At the Cape of Good Hope.

The Cape of Storms.

It couldn't be named.

No hot water?

You know there is.

Indigenous forest.

The Dutch cut down the trees in 1652.

Planted Italian pines.

So that the sand wouldn't erode she says.

Seal colonies in the Atlantic.

Near where the two oceans meet.

Big waves.

Hout Bay.

False Bay.

Long Beach.

Quicksand.

Holland needed a garden.

On the way to India she says.

So the sailors wouldn't get scurvy.

Cape Point.

Cape of Storms.

The Atlantic.

The cliff face.

I throw you.

The lighthouse.

Where two oceans meet.

The Indian Ocean and the Atlantic.

One warm. One cold.

Some currents. But otherwise nothing dramatic she says.

Far out in the ocean you see four whales.

Round rings in the water.

The place of the winds.

The windiest place in South Africa.

A troop of baboons cross the road.

The ones that have learned to feed from the sea.

Drought.

It's good for us.

What do you need rain for?

Wild almond.

They were planted between the colonizers and *the locals* she says.

Like a border.

The fruit is poisonous.

It looks like an octopus. I think. She says.

In 1902 Cecil Rhodes.

Donated all the land for the botanical garden.

Yes. He was a racist. I will not lie to you.

How to do things with words you think.

When you pass *a location* placed far away from the wealthy white houses.

She talks about the satellite disks.

And then you see them.

And hardly anything else.

Not the poverty.

Not the density.

You only have to pay three hundred rand she says.

A one-time payment. For life.

But they only transmit a few channels.

My mother died a month ago she suddenly says.

It was my first impulse.

To come here to the botanical garden.

We were always here when I was a child.

The adults sat on the grass.

We ran all the way up into the mountains.

He took plants and trees with him from all corners of the world.

And planted them she says.

To see which ones would root and could grow.

The garden of the colonizers.

The donated terrain.

Give back the land.

The sentence he erased.

The passage.

Why are you undressing me and not yourself?

I'm going to take a walk.

Alone?

No you can join me.

He beats against the wallpaper with the naked female body parts.

White.

Saying stop looking at me.

He doesn't get up immediately.

Stroking your hips.

What are you thinking about he asks again at the airport.

About you you answer.

Go back to Istanbul he says.

Think of Istanbul.

She should stay inside until things calm down.

Then she can go.

Feminists with children are now welcome on board.

You think you hear her saying.

You lay your head against his shoulder on the plane.

You look sexy he says in the morning.

Who are you talking to you ask.

You.

What do you want he asks.

What makes you happy.

You could answer fucking.

But you don't.

When you fuck me.

Small things you answer.

Sacrifices then.

That you came here. All this long way.

You see the whorls of his ears. At the restaurant.

As if you hadn't seen them before.

From Zimbabwe the woman answers when he goes out to talk on his phone.

Papa is your husband she asks.

No a friend.

How many kids do you have.

Two.

Me too.

Daughters.

You eat with your hands.

Don't have a choice.

Watch him lick his hands clean.

Don't understand how the fougou can stay so clean on his plate.

Cassava he says.

You see a man pounding with a wooden pole behind the counter.

Is it a long process.

Yes.

What he says when you come in after smoking out on the street.

Why do they steal he says.

I would also steal you say if I were in this country.

This fucked up continent he says.

The tip of this fucked up continent.

Where do you come from.

Are you talking to me boss asks the driver and turns around.

Zim boss.

Do you know any Nigerian restaurants.

Yes.

The taxi is stopped by the police.

He was drunk says the driver when he comes back.

The police told me to put something on the seat he says and sits behind the wheel.

It's like in Nigeria he says.

It's like everywhere he responds.

You are really adventurous he says at the restaurant.

What a strange street.

You looked down at the waves for a long time.

Blue. Massive.

How they were beating against the nearly vertical cliff face.

It's the end of the world he says about Nice.

Did I bring my inhaler with me he asks on the street.

You can't understand.

Everything she said. The guide. About the country.

What a machinery you think.

For occupying and plundering.

Keeping the wealth.

Considering the country theirs.

How they succeeded.

Three break-ins this morning she says.

Despite the armed guards.

The last shall be the first.

Mandela's Gold in the garden.

It took ten years to breed it.

He shows you music videos all evening.

From Lagos. Abuja.

That Mandela shit doesn't interest me.

It was better under the dictatorship than under democracy.

Everything is corrupt.

It's not democracy it's capitalism.

And what do you think of capitalism.

You see the cargo ships.

His white undershirt over the shower door.

Why are you breathing like this. Uneven.

I left her in the labyrinth you think.

At the white lighthouse on Cape Point.

How could I leave her in the labyrinth.

He closes the door to talk undisturbed.

Desire is always a question.

It darkens over the sea.

The ships are lit-up.

The lanterns.

What a strange street.

He laughs again at the street where you were robbed.

I can vanish you say.

I'm good at vanishing.

I'll find you in a hole he says.

I'm scared you say and go in to him.

I'll join you he says.

Like a seven-year-old child he laughs.

And lays down next to you.

You weave your feet with his.

Hear his breathing.

I'm happy if you are.

You hear his phone receive its messages.

When he has fallen asleep.

Again and again.

Somewhere out there.

The two oceans meet.

Between the two cities.

Do you call this blond he says holding a strand.

White you reply.

The sun rises over the ocean.

The cargo ships move almost magnetically toward the opening.

A line.

Glinting in the light.

You hear the seagulls.

The sun warming.

Through the window.

It's blowing hard.

Hungry. Angry.

You never hear the difference.

It's a man's world. He plays it. Many versions.

Why do white people do this.

It's really misogynistic.

James Brown. 1966 he says. I was a dream then.

An apartheid weapon he says. About the baton hanging on the door.

They used to beat black people with it.

The rain reaches Port Elizabeth.

Big raindrops.

A family of dreamers.

The days end. The hours pass.

Darkness falls.

To survive the night. In the wind.

The wind picks up.

From the infinite no conclusions can be drawn.

Or the impossible.

The infinite or the impossible you try to remember.

The sun rises behind the tall houses.

Children climb the hill in their school uniforms.

A smell like brown coal enters the room.

Traffic at the harbor.

A long freight train.

Fog over the sea.

The clouds in veils and whorls.

The world washed of its massacres.

Not washed.

At all.

All its massacres.

From each side of the globe.

The map and the history.

The lighthouse.

Green fields.

She falls asleep next to you on the bus.

Almost everyone falls asleep.

Her head drops down. Bobbing.

She straightens up.

Then her head drops again.

Sleep and vigil.

Bird-of-paradise.

Bird of paradise flower.

The colonizer's sublime landscape.

Love they say.

Writes Coetzee.

For the country.

But the problem with mountains trees and plants is that they do not respond.

No one knows if the love is returned.

A white statue. Gleaming. The descended body. The passion.

You dream when you fall asleep for a few minutes next to him.

Waking. Dozing off.

Then fall into a deep sleep.

Did it mean danger. Rest.

You don't know any longer.

The danger has already passed.

Early morning. Silent.

He gets furious at the restaurant.

The spear he says when he sees it on the wall.

Africa. White supremacists. White privileges he says.

To be or not to be.

A white lover.

The road that was once a river.

And turned into a road.

And therefore always unstable.

Where they wanted to stay unborn. Yearned to return. If they were born.

To the unborn world.

Until he saw his mother's face and didn't want to see it in sorrow.

You cannot have boots all the time he says and points

at his flip-flops.

As if you were going to stay a long time.

The white stone walls.

The bird in the morning.

The people going out for the day.

Said good morning.

The stairs where you were smoking.

The narrow ledge you sat on.

Give back the land.

To erase that passage.

To reconcile with your parents.

Their dreams.

Not with those coming after.

Let me clean this place he says and sweeps.

Spraying. Shuffling around.

The sun is already setting.

Just now there was such a beautiful afternoon light.

It still gleams over the ocean.

A boat with a red hull lies at anchor in the light.

Still.

Why are you doing this to me he says.

Why are you doing this to me you say.

You curl up against him.

I'm bad at departures.

If sleep.

Signals danger.

What a beautiful evening you say when you see the full moon outside.

My dad says that white people always talk about the beautiful days.

The beautiful weather he replies.

For us it's just day. As it always is.

I pushed you on the side you say.

The man who walks by you in the morning says beautiful morning.

Better weather than yesterday.

Are you freaking out.

You saw a crown. A skull. A crown.

Fell asleep next to him.

Dressed.

Woke up and took off your clothes.

The bed is smaller he said in the morning.

Spicy he said about the food.

Why are you burnt he says about your face.

You are spreading your words again you say.

Stroking him over the hip. The stomach.

I love your smell.

I know you do.

He lays down on his back.

But this is ejaculation.

I'm so tired.

My father warned me.

That it would stress me to be here.

Cancel your ticket and stay here. How long is your visa?

Words. Words.

Only the first half came to you.

To give what you do not have.

In the backyard.

Or the courtyard.

Your beauty always overwhelms me.

The white stone walls. The moon. Behind thin clouds.

Not quite full yet.

A man washes his car. Or someone else's car in the morning.

You see him when you go out to smoke.

Do you have three hundred rand he asks.

You walk out.

See something that could be an African raven.

I was mugged by a stereotype. Then.

He laughs.

You wake up and go down and turn on the water boiler.

Make coffee.

When the world or the globe spins.

The descended body. All white. Blazing.

The quiet night.

He will win you say.

The world is like that.

Now. One per mille who want to own everything.

Distribute the leftovers to those willing to support them.

They've probably learnt from each other.

The wall.

To build yet another one.

The roar.

Build it build it.

How that roar sounded in Europe. Just now.

Different. Silent.

It was built.

You ate some grains of rice.

I'm too sad to eat.

Rode over the plain.

Autumn light.

Bare trees.

Warmth.

Thirty-six percent unemployment in Eastern Cape.

Twenty-five percent in Cape Town.

Fifty percent in Nigeria.

All politicians are so corrupt says the taxi driver.

Plays Michael Jackson for you.

In two days you will smile again he says.

Hope is what we have isn't it?

Dawn over the Indian Ocean.

The pink clouds. How they change.

The more the sun rises.

Tiny birds land on the cactus.

Safe trip.

A foghorn is heard. Again.

The cargo ships in the haze.

Blue-white haze around the hulls.

Schoolchildren climb the hill again.

The city wakes.

Cars. Honking.

The brutal Atlantic trade.

Sirens.

The delicate birds are visible in the daylight.

With long tail feathers. A yellow feather among them.

The sun's rays in the grass outside the window.

I'm waiting he says on the stairs.

For the question you never ask.

Pulls on the lining of your jeans.

The country below.

The green fields.

That which glints like silver on the ground.

If it is small rivers weaving between the green fields.

Or roads.

How the rays fall. Near the South Pole.

A lake. Peaks. Table Mountain.

Winter light over South Africa.

All Europeans look the same to me.

The low sun. In the afternoon.

Everything so slow.

The famished road.

To give what you do not have.

The long gaps in breath.

To someone.

When it begins again.

Who doesn't want it.

The breathing.

Like after a drowning.

Breathe you said.

Flying.

Falling as flying.

You went out to smoke.

You just close your eyes and open them and I'll be there.

You pant. But walk over it.

The border.

Dreamlike.

The sleep.

Deep. Gentle.

A night flight over the continent.

When you see his face. The distinct profile.

What is the relationship between South Africa and Dubai you wonder.

At Dubai's airport.

Diamonds probably.

The sun rises.

37 degrees outside.

Cagliari. Tunis. Carthage.

The plane turns over the continent again.

The eastern side. Northern.

Was my freedom not given to me then in order to build the world of the You?