

Choosing Performances

As she stepped from the limousine
that had brought her from the Cape Town
airport to the hotel, the state-aligned police
made a barricade of bulky arms, interlocked

to keep the mixed and boisterous crowds
from pressing too close to the ballerina,
hailed by some for her limpid *arabesques*,
spell-binding: from abroad.

But one man,
who later said he had walked from Nyanga,
a black shanty township, many miles distant,
pressed his way forward to speak as she passed
towards the canopied entry.

“I have come
to watch you dance between the rain drops.”

She smiled. (That day the sun still shone.)
Though shoved back by police, he smiled in return,

and then, though footsore, accepted
what she spoke next:

“I have come
to this city, in person,
to announce
that I am cancelling
all my performances.
Your great man Nelson
Mandela remains
imprisoned on Robben
Island, on his knees
breaking stone”

(not like that other, the world’s legend, who danced
in Cape Town, traversing the stage *en pointe*,
and later for General Pinochet, and then
for President Marcos, Imelda his wife--
she of the shoes, the three thousand pair).

