

Leopard in a Parking Lot

Thirteen vans,
Prestige Safaris,
Born Free Safaris,
A & K,
Academic, and
eighty-three clients
contend for views
among sand mounds,
thornbush and diesel exhaust.

We wait, blocked in
like cars at a drive-in movie.
I strain for a slot-view
through the dusty windshield
between white vans
of the small spotted form.

Leopard! Leopard!
the whisper-shout.
Tourist heads and torsos
in safari hats, bandanas,
dark glasses and suntans
protrude through roof ports,
aim bazooka-like telephotos,
acquire and engage the target,
ka-chuck, ka-chuck, ka-chuck
motor drives power automatic shutters
in Canons, Nikons and Minoltas.

The leopard, lithe and supple
in my viewfinder,
sprawls on an arching limb
unconcerned, remote,
tail and limbs dangling.

The drivers call back and forth
in Swahili,
but no one moves.
The leopard stands, stretches
descends.

Vans come to life,
leave to take up the chase.
We pull forward onto the road
hoping the leopard will reappear
to cross the road ahead of us.

There it is!
Small and close in the
red dust haze.
I snap off a quick shot,
pray for focus,
as a van cuts us off.

The leopard is gone.