

Tanzania 1982

Naabi Hill

Naabi Hill rises
from the patterned cloth of the plain,
clothed in soft acacia.
The sharp-faced Egyptian vulture
and its bland Nubian cousin
note our approach.

Tall Twiga*, in brown military camouflage,
stalk slowly through feather-branched trees
and watch.

The Land Rover rebounds from the rutted track,
indifferent to direction,
then slouches to a tilted stop.
Flat tire, left rear again, our 28th breakdown.

We stare into the dioramic distance.
A stipple of wildebeest swirls slowly,
rearranging itself into a lance head flowing east.

Binoculars focus on the stream of animals
stringing out in full flight
from the epicenter of catastrophe.
Now the line slows, curls back,
forms an arena of shaggy heads
to watch the single combat.

A brown feline form has a yearling calf
by the nose.
They tug back and forth, twisting,
legs braced.
They circle locked together.

“Let’s go!” We run to the Land Rover,
careen down the hill slope.

A brown impression in the grass
faced by three zebra
becomes a cheetah
resting beside his kill
among white trumpet flowers of *Datura* and
purple *Erlangia*.

The cheetah glances toward us
then back over his shoulder, downslope,
raises, then settles again.
Confusion, shrill shouts and whispered orders
from the cars.
The cheetah sits up, looks away again
then, taking a hind leg
turns over the crumpled carcass
and feeds on the warm loin.

* giraffe