

SPOON RIVER IN UGANDA

WILLIAM WALSH

On the road from Kampala, the air was heavy
as jackfruit when we left Fort Portal,
twelve hours of ruts and dust to watch elephants.
It was only me and the bus driver (Moses) awake
in the darkness, chewing sugarcane
and gnawing roasted goat
from the night before. The sulfur smell
from the Lake Katwe salt mines
gave me a headache. Cab light weak,
I read a poem by a man now dead,
his distant epistle radio-ing an important message
from somewhere, like the letter I wrote my grandfather
in 1990, returning to me two months ago
after my aunt sifted through his desk
for some insurance papers. To hold on to my letter
all these years—I wasn't quite sure
what to make of it. Maybe it was the last
letter I wrote him before cheap long-distance,
or maybe, like a poem, he occasionally read it
to hear my voice. Then at five-thirty in the morning,
with no bota-bota cutting us off in traffic,
as Moses negotiated a slight curve
on a country road, a leopard crossed my path.