

From Nairobi to Ileret

How I Drove to the Beginning of the World

*When you leave the comforts of Nairobi by road
For the Kenya's Very Arid Dwarf Scrubland,
Leaving behind the exquisite C-named ladies,
(Don't ask me to name any names...age aged memories)
The nostalgia lasts only as long as the crossing of Thika Road.*

*You are ready for an adventure ablaze with wonder,
Provided you escape the ravenous charge
Of the matatu drivers, those self-crowned kings of chaos.
One suspects their license is granted only after
Flunking most of the traffic rules
And displaying exemplary incompetence
In courtesy, good judgment and respect for human life.*

*Past Thika, the A2 unfolds; Murang'a's emerald hills
Melt into Nyeri's, beneath Kirinyaga's sacred crown,
Where even Eden's gardener might envy such a green,
And Ngai still keeps his watch from snow-clad Mount Kenya.*

*Laikipia's wide plains gently rock you into sleep;
Then Nanyuki awakes you with its merry hawkers,
Whose smiles could coax the final shilling from a miser's hand.
And should they fail, the police will finish off the task -
For every roadside stop conceals a tax they never wrote.*

It's nearly the only dark spot of this journey.

*Soon Mount Kenya's foothills rise to greet the road,
Their rolling hills like tales from One Thousand and One Nights.
Three hours without a pause, the driver finally declares
A health break at a humble nyama choma stop in Timau.
You stretch your weary limbs, answer nature's call,
Then taste the tenderest goat to ever grace your tongue.*

*Refreshed, you journey on,
Skirting the Samburu, never quite crossing into their land,
Where singing wells still echo beneath beaded skies.
Trees whisper to each other; goats and camels graze in peace;
Nature seems reconciled with both herself and humankind.
If Earth were nothing but this Kenyan basin,
There would have been no need for COPs.
Here the climate still remembers its manners:
The rains arrive to green the fields and swell the grain,
The sun returns to warm the waiting earth,
And no season arrives shouting louder than the last.*

*And here we stand upon the threshold
Of Kenya's vast arid and semi-arid lands.
Isiolo appears: Dust, litter... its streets deserve far better
Than those entrusted with their keeping.
Yet God, it seems, has never left the place.
You need only raise your eyes from the streets.*

*Ab... the women of Isiolo! They wear each hue
The Creator had kept in reserve for Beauty's masterpiece.
For here the blood of Meru, Maasai, Samburu,
Borana, Rendille and Gabra mingles as one,
As though Heaven itself had painted a rainbow
And breathed it into living souls.*

*The road runs on, straight as a spear,
Through Archer's Post, Merille and Laisamis.
The Kaisut Desert opens its mineral arms,
Where camel caravans drift across the horizon,
Guardians of a time forgotten by clocks.*

*Then Marsabit rises - a black mountain from the sand,
An island of forest afloat on a sea of fire.
Within its crater lies Lake Paradise,
An emerald mirror hidden deep in the park,
Where great tuskers still come down to drink.*

*But the pilgrimage does not end at Marsabit.
It presses on toward North Horr,
Across the great Chalbi, desert of salt and mirages,
Where the road dissolves into a blaze of white.
Tarmac yields to dust, and dust becomes queen;
The doum palms alone still mark the way.
Yet Gabra children calmly tend their herds,
Where even the wind has long since lost heart.*

*And then, beyond that mineral wilderness,
A turquoise sea bursts from the desert:
Lake Turkana - the Jade Sea of the early explorers;
An emerald of legend cradled by the Rift.
Here, they say, humanity first found its feet.
At last, Ileret, where science meets wonder;
Sibiloi and Koobi Fora,
Where fossil bones whisper a tale older than every myth,
And the first human footsteps still echo through time.*

*May every African make this pilgrimage before he dies,
If only to remember where humanity first opened its eyes.
For Kenya is among those blessed lands
From which Heaven withheld almost nothing,
God's only lasting disappointment,
One suspects,
Was entrusting its government
To His human apprentices.*

*Ismael Teta
Ileret, Marsabit, Kenya, 17 July 2026*