

Grace in Motion

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On this lovely rainy morning, as puffy white clouds with stormy grey bottoms drift across the sky, I find myself writing from indoors, versus the outdoor spaces that usually captivate my senses. The rhythmic pitter-patter of raindrops against the windowpane creates a cozy ambiance that contrasts with the usual bustling energy of the outdoors. As I gaze outside, the lush greenery seems even more alive, each leaf and flower sparkling with raindrops, nature's own delicate jewels. The air carries a faint earthy scent, a reminder of the rejuvenation this rainfall brings to the land. The symphony of distant thunder adds an element of grandeur to the scene, reminding me of the power and beauty of the natural world. I'm taken back to the ten days this summer when we took a safari in Kenya, and I looked across the far expanse of the savannah. The rain outside seems to echo the rhythm of that distant land, connecting the lushness of my current view with the arid beauty of the African plains.

In my mind's eye, I remember a scene of forty colossal cape buffalo, a living embodiment of strength and wild beauty, slowly traversing the expanse of the land. I am positioned on the opposite side of the watering hole that they are heading toward, a curious observer separated by the trappings of a ditch and protective fencing. Yet, this strategic vantage point affords me an intimate encounter with these majestic creatures as they march with a purposeful gait towards their destination.

Each member of this impressive assembly tips the scales at a staggering 900 pounds, and some even approach a ton. Their imposing mass belies their elegance as they gracefully move together. There is no frantic jostling or disorder among them, no individual rushing ahead in a bid to quench its thirst first. Instead, they flow together as an organic whole. In stark contrast, mere feet away from my position, humans bustle with their own activities. People scurry about, anticipation palpable in the air, eagerly awaiting the opening of the dinner buffet. The quiet arrival of the cape buffalo, zebras, elephants, and others, gently organising themselves along the edge of the watering hole, contrasts with the frenetic energy of the diners. Amidst the chaos, diners buzz around, raising their voices to be heard over the clamour of the crowded room, oblivious to the magnificent creatures just a few feet away, engaged in their tranquil evening drink. Two waiters

appear at the dining room entrance, each awkwardly manoeuvring a sizable container toward the centre of the room. Their steps lack synchronisation, each dedicated to hurriedly delivering the food as fast as possible. Meanwhile, the diners clumsily inch closer to the front of the line, as if proximity to the source would expedite the arrival of their meals. The juxtaposition strikes me—here I stand, an enthralled witness to the buffalo's unhurried approach to the watering hole, while nearby, the human world whirls in a flurry of anticipation.

A poignant realisation dawns upon me—humans, it seems, are captive to the whims of their own goals, ensnared in the labyrinth of their anticipations for the future. Their mental landscapes are painted with visions of forthcoming meals to quell their hunger or, failing that, to fulfil their many desires. I am no exception to this pattern. How often have I found myself eagerly awaiting a meal, only to consume it hastily and thoughtlessly. Meanwhile, in stark contrast, the buffalo are present in their bodies and with each other, in no rush to quench their thirst as they gracefully move across the land.

It was like this with all the thousands of animals we witnessed over those unforgettable days, without a single exception. As I observed the imposing African Elephants, with the males weighing in at over 7 tons and the females at 4 tons, I beheld these immense beings through a fresh perspective. My preconceived notion of their footsteps resembling thunderous crashes across the earth was swiftly dispelled. Instead, their colossal strides were but a faint murmur upon the terrain, not the anticipated resounding boom. These titans of the savannah, much like the cape buffalo, exuded an undeniable air of elegance and effortlessness in their movement. Every step they took, filled with a gentle graceful ease, highlighted the presence they held within their own bodies.

Immersed in the company of countless captivating African animals for ten consecutive days, including a myriad of buffalo, elephants, as well as hippopotamuses, giraffes, gazelle, ostriches, lions, cheetahs, wildebeest, and impala, I found myself existing in their midst. From dawn till dusk, day after day, their very essences seemed to integrate into my own. I could feel my own body as it moved across the earth in a different way. I received the gift of their graceful presence modelled for me, and a fragment of their essence was carried home, residing within me.

At times, a wave of longing washes over me—a yearning for the sense of connectedness and fluid presence that being with those animals brought. Yet, I also simply miss the animals themselves. I ache for the symphony of sounds—the gentle yet resolute tug of grass as an elephant grazes, uprooting it from the earth or the low rumble of a buffalo's call, resonating through the air,

or the piercing high pitch of a hyena's squeal, cutting through the night. My heart longs to once again observe the grazing animals—gazelles, impalas, and zebras—feeding side by side, watching out for one another. I yearn for the sight of the cape buffalo as they gather in groups, their eyes meeting ours as we passed by, signalling a deep connection between our worlds.

The rain has eased into a gentle drizzle, and I'm venturing outdoors for my morning walk. Perhaps I'll see some cows in the forest today. They'll traverse the forest with the same unhurried pace, pausing now and then to regard me, evoking memories of the buffalo's contemplative gaze. There's also the chance of encountering elk, the giants of this forest. The bull elk can weigh over 1000 pounds. And just as my immersion with the African animals taught me, I'll be reminded to become present within my body. I'll stride unhurriedly, syncing my pace with theirs. I'll walk slowly, synchronising my steps with the rhythm of my awareness, forging a connection with my body, and learning from the animals how to be, gracefully, human.