When one of the soldiers asked me about my fever, despite the fact that I was almost seeing double, and couldn’t get my head clear of the zebra I’d seen killed by lions the day before—

the zebra on its side, striped legs jerking, twitching, as their heads disappeared, necks shoved up to the shoulders into its belly—

I said, *No, the fever’s better,*

*let’s go for a ride.*

So he put me on the back of his motorbike, an ancient Honda 160 with blown-out baffles so it made a rackety, popping roar that split my head in two. The old Somali poet, as we took off, was still reciting his poem about wanting to go home:

beard stiff

with henna, his old pants immaculately clean despite the dust and living in a hut with a floor made of flattened out CARE cardboard from unpacked medical supplies.

The United States must help us, he sang, and, What do you have for me, now that I have taken time from my busy schedule to sing for you? I had nothing to give him and so I smiled a sort of hangdog smile—which was when the soldier said: *How is your fever? Would you like to go for a ride?*

Dust and wind and engine throb blacked out any sound so we were completely cocooned in our own cloud, muffling grayness spreading ear to ear—

my arms wrapped around the soldier’s waist, his sweating shirtback drying into my sweating shirtfront,
we passed the compound where an hour ago
I heard a woman tell the registration officer,
nervously giggling through the translator’s English,
  that she’d been “done to”—
    a young woman with large eyes,
solidly built, holding a cell phone she kept
looking down at as if expecting it to ring—
while other women at other desks stared into
digital cameras taking their photos,
biometric scans of face and fingerprints,
fingerprints then inked the old-fashioned way
into a dossier, questions and answers,
any known enemies, was your husband
or brother part of a militia, which militia?
Faces looking back from computer screens
logging each face into the files, 500 each day
lining up outside the fences, more and more
wanting in as me and the soldier and the motorbike’s
grit and oil-fume haze stinging my skin
cast a giant shadow-rider riding alongside us,
human and machine making a new being
not even a hyena, who eats everything,
even the bones, and shits bone-white scat, could hold in its jaws.

Nostrils parching, the potholed road drifted deep
made my fever rear back as the bike
hit a rise and fishtailed, almost crashing
into a pothole while I hung on
tighter, not in the least bit scared, as if all my fever
could take in was what the single cylinder
two stroke piston inside its housing kept on