

Niki Johnson

MONGOOSES

(for Rikki-Tikki)



I

Banded bodies on a termite mound
still as sculpted slate they look
with eyes as roundly inquisitive
as the child who stares back.
Rustle a paper bag, they will come
to you, expecting a treat.

II

Oh sly, earthy ones
ochre-eyed and quick
as a winter sunset

when mother snake slides
malarial, from tree, you watch

flat, lade with quiet
I discover your secret.

III

Like a tuft of dandelion
your drifting gait
may turn at any angle
to chase – parallel

dodge from old Nagaina
who knows
her eggs are not safe.