

The Way
by Janet Spaletto

They don't know the way, she does.

Wise one knows where water flows.

She's led them before. Young, old, mothers and children
in rhythmic procession across the drought-stricken savanna.

Like last year and each year before. But this year
matriarch's sixth sense lures her off the path. Ears flapping,
trunk extended she rushes toward bones lying bleached
and alone under scorching mid-day sun.

One of their own, an adult, tusks intact.

Family? friend? No matter.

She trumpets in recognition, circles the bones.
Gentle caresses brush the skull, stroke the ivory.

Her snorts blow dust onto the pile.

One by one her family joins in ritual
touch, smell, examine and rumble.

Each lending voice to the requiem chant
for this lonely soul of the savanna.

When all fall silent old one swings her foot, turns
and shows them the way to
where water flows and grass is green.