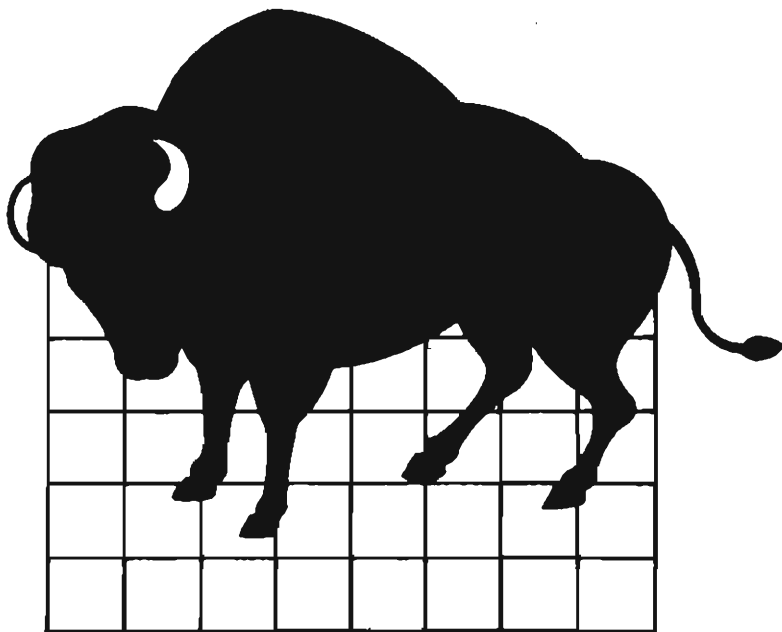


LINDA SILLITOE

The Buffalo and the Dentist

Frontier Village, restored and furnished
with relics of ancestral time
includes live anachronisms.
So we saunter to see the buffalo, laughing,
swinging up between corral boards
and nearly boot it in the rump as we demand,
“Where’s the buffalo?—oh!”

It revolves its huge head and looks
(we are wordless) then slowly swivels back.
Its tail quivers
but it will not heave up its woolly, dung-clotted bulk
and trot about.
It stares with bitter eyes
at the diagonal corner of its little brown yard.



In outrage the buffalo is penned
adjacent to obtuse oxen and pioneer ponies;
for it is autumn and Indian summer scorches
the prairies; he gallops in rhythm
with the intent, rumbling herd, writing a thunder
over a landscape; then butts a close, humid cow
toward violence beneath shadowing trees,
bellows an alarum to the young bulls.
And the smells of heated grass and cow,
the river below and sweating sun ripen his blood;
the noise of his fellows is warm in his ears.

Thinking these things you are transported in time
past the buffalo's eyes to a tidy office
rank with sweet antiseptics, close as your foolish
mortification. You pose tilted, hands gripped,
hating the trifling pain and the roar and vibrating charge
of the drill to your bone.
The pert nurse frisks her short skirt away
from you, pats crisp hair. Mouth agape,
you drool ridiculous blood trying to recall something
profound you once said, and stare humiliated
at a dentist's ski-sunburned head.

Though the buffalo could preside in the center and roar
at the sides, it slakes in the corner and slobbers,
ignoring its viewers with weary hostility;
mud melts beneath its indifferent loins,
and a domestic sparrow feeds between the tips of its horns.