

DAUGHTER BUFFALO

We walked through the cat house, stopping at each cage to admire the grace and courage evident in spite of the habitual attitude of imprisonment that replaced brightness in the eyes with bewilderment and a perpetual leaking from the tear ducts that looked very much like real tears for real reasons, and the sleek coat with dull dry tufts of fur. We stopped by the old toast-brown lion, commiserating with it. Its head appeared abnormally large in the small cage with the mane resembling a growth prompted by endocrine imbalance rather than by essential lionhood. The flesh on its hind legs hung loose like the shanks of an old man, and the testicles were dropped and withered, almost brushing the floor of the cage.

"He's a real old codger," Turnlung said admiringly.

"He needs a bath," I said, surprised at my sudden prim interest in cleanliness which I felt I'd had too much of in my life. "He stinks."

"Too right he does. They all stink. It's the real prison stink. I wonder what feelings about us they release with this stink. No offense to your city, my dear, but it reminds me of all those hostile New Yorkers farting away on their public transport."

We came then to the buffalo enclosure containing, so the notice said, a female and her daughter of six months standing in the shelter of her mother on the molting patch of grass, with an expression of bewilderment exactly like her mother's: a family conspiracy of sullen bewilderment.

"They look pretty lonely standing there," Turnlung said. "As if they'd been offered the world, the earth and the sky, and they had to refuse, and couldn't explain the refusal. The baby's aged a lot in six months." He spoke tenderly, as if it were a human child.

We turned away from the buffaloes because, suddenly, neither of us could face their quiet immobility and patience and the bewilderment wearing away their lives as the pressure of their bodies was wearing away the grass of their enclosure, until unless artificial turf were laid, the grass would be unlikely to grow again. We joined the crowd to watch the seals swimming and leaping and barking in a way that could be interpreted, gratefully, as approval of the human race, if one were in a self-congratulatory mood. We relaxed. The crowd clapped and laughed its enjoyment.



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