

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

Lowell Jaeger

A neighbor's yard sale,
decades too late. Inside
a tin canister of castoff
hardware, I found a rusted key. The sort
used to wind a grandfather clock.
Or cock the coiled spring
of a child's mechanized toy.

Like the ragged buffalo
my half-breed ne'er-do-well mother's
half brother gave me. Without
the key. Chunks
of hide torn away.
Hooves worn clean
to his dull metal bones.

Looks like he's gone over hell.
And back. The adults
at my birthday shook their heads.
No good Uncle Jack.
No key. Likely bought the damn thing
at a Thrift Store.
Or stole it.

Sure, I didn't care to get near
Uncle No Good. A no-show
this day. No surprise
in that. But the old bull
got through to me over
all other gifts.

I sat quiet
hours apart from everyone.
Learned to prod a foreleg,
set a-whir the gears
of shoulders and hind quarters.
Set something ancient in motion.
Learned how to cross the prairies
alone. Like a renegade.
Last of his kind.

A dying breed.