

Woodsong from Excerpt

By Gary Paulsen

"My brain is running wild with this thought when the dogs stop and I look up and there is an enormous bull buffalo standing in front of my leader, smelling his head.

I stare at it for a long time. The man in the trench coat is back on my sled and the buffalo is standing there. My befuddled brain simply thinks it's another hallucination and I wait for it to disappear.

It doesn't.

I try to hush the man on the sled because I am worried he will anger the buffalo. I have never seen an angry buffalo, even in a hallucination, and do not want to start now. The buffalo seems as big as a house, but it slowly seeps into my thinking, like mud warming, that the dogs would not have stopped for my hallucination.

It is a real buffalo.

There is a herd of real buffalo in the Burn and this bull stands looking down on my leader—Wilson, who is very sweet and a wonderful dog but dumber than a walnut—smelling him.

I call the dogs up and they go around the bull and I am surprised when the man on the sled says nothing though we pass not four feet from the buffalo and could easily touch it. The buffalo does nothing to us, is very mellow.

I hear later that another musher fell asleep in the Burn next to his sled—his dogs were resting—and when he woke up the buffalo was standing over him, straddling him, smelling the breath as it came out of his nostrils.

Buffalo, he says when he tells of it—there is strangely no fear in his voice—have very bad breath."

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