

Buffalo Talks
To The Moon



Calling Book

Prologue A buffalo talks to the audience

SETTING: *(The ever-present Rocky Mountains are visible over a prairie with the remnants of trails plowed under. Small playing areas scatter the landscape – an open area down center for the river, campfires and areas surrounded by open prairie. There is an interior of a saloon, pieced together from remnants of overland wagon travel, pine and prairie clay. There is a bar and stairway which leads up to a sparsely furnished room.)*

5 sec post Lx 7

SQ 1.75

Lx 11

— AT RISE: *(A lone buffalo sits under a large moon, surveying the prairie. She speaks.)*

BUFFALO

Ever make a wish upon the moon? A rising moon, golden and full...like a promise? Ever stare at the moon and forget why you're lookin'?

Perched on the edge of a continent, a newly formed people continued to focus east over the water -- toward their former home. That went on for a hundred years or so and then, some restless soul, some moon-struck dreamer turned their head...*(she illustrates by turning her head slowly)* ... the other direction. West!

And soon, the rush to something golden and full of promise called many more. What they found was a landscape more alien than anything they had ever encountered. Mountains higher than any eastern foot had known, vast open spaces, populated by great woolly beasts, and cultures quite outside their own understanding of the world. I am told they sent letters back home. **Strange tales**... ever see a buffalo talk to the stars? Like that. A dream never expected, like postcards from the moon.

When trails are ploughed under, and I am long gone, who will tell my story? Letters and stories get lost. Perhaps the moon remembers.

(She looks out at the prairie)

Look, a storm is coming in. 1+ 2+

Lx 15

SQ 2

Stby Lx 15
Stby Sq 2

Scene 1 Storm in the gulch

(Ellie's Saloon, night. A crack of thunder is heard and a downpour. Lightning flashes fast. A frantic knocking can be heard. Ellie enters from back of the bar with a lantern and a rifle.)

ELLIE

Who's there? What do you want?

(Ben hauls in Jack. Both are drenched. Lights are dim.)

Get on in here! Here Ben, set him there.

BEN

Set here Jack.

ELLIE

You drivin' them beeves in this storm?!

BEN

Caught us by surprise. Lightnin' set the herd runnin'!

ELLIE

What in blazes is Bill thinkin'! It's the middle of the night!

BEN

He'll be along soon. Jack, come on now. Jack, can ya hear me?! *(Eleanor bends to attend to Jack)* Got thrown. Crack o' lightin' set the herd runnin'!

ELLIE

Don't seem to be trampled any.

BEN

Talk to me Jack!

(Thunder cracks and Jack stirs, mumbling.)

JACK

(disoriented)

Jim. Where's Jim. Ben, see to him, he's like to break a leg.

BEN

Jim's run off – on all four legs, last I seen. Jack, you in one piece?

Stby Sq 2.5

JACK

Jack's gone. Washed away down the river in a storm.

BEN

Mam, you got some salts? He's not talkin' sense. Jack you're right here in Ellie's saloon. Jim'll find his way home.

ELLIE

He don't need salts, he needs a gut warmer. I'll heat up some coffee.

(Eleanor sets a bottle of whisky on the bar and gets coffee. Kittie comes down the stairs in an elaborate nightgown, carrying a lantern)



KITTIE

What in Sam Hill? Jack! Is Jack alright?

SQ 2.5

Kittie ENT

BEN

Bill'll be along anytime, he's pennin' the steers.

KITTIE

I don't give a holler 'bout Bill McKay, get out of my road. Jack? Can ya hear me? Jack?

JACK

Jack's dead.

KITTIE

I'll take it from here. *(she begins to help Jack to his feet)* Let's get you out of them wet clothes.

(Ellie comes back with hot coffee)

ELLIE

Kittie, we're managing here. Go in and heat up some of that soup from dinner. We got to warm this boy fast. He's shakin' somethin' fierce!

BEN

He's just frightened, is all.

ELLIE

He's soaked through. Likely hypo-thermia. Where's Bill? Any fool could see them thunder clouds was gonna let loose come candlelight! Katherine, get that soup.

KITTIE

Jack? You're in the saloon. Ellie and Ben are here.

JACK

(taking the cup from Ellie)

Thank you Mam. Can't seem t-t-to stop sh-sh-shakin'. Ben, did ya see Jim?

BEN

There was a hard flash not twenty feet from the ridge! Lit up the whole valley. *(to Ellie)* We were only about two miles out. His horse bolted, I guess.

KITTIE

Jack, let's head upstairs.

JACK

I never saw anything like that. They were runnin' wild!

BEN

We seen stampedes a'for.

JACK

Not like that. The lightin'. There was lightning running like rivers through the herd! Balls of blue lightning like—rivers—racing right up their *horns!* Little blue beads jumpin' from back to back. They were wild from it!

ELLIE

You get struck?!

JACK

Don't think so. But all the hairs sat straight up and prickling on my neck. Jim's mane was bristlin' with it. Then next I knew I was flyin' through the rain and flat on my back! Rain in my mouth, nearly drownin'...nearly drownin' from the water! *(to Kittie)* I was drownin' Kit.

ELLIE

Let's get you out of these wet clothes.

KITTIE

Up you git.

(She shifts Jack up the stairs.)

Ellie, jus bring that soup upstairs. Come on Jack. Let's get them clothes shucked.

ELLIE

Kittie, I warned you bout bringing men up there. We got things handled. This ain't the Green Front.

KITTIE

I told ya, he's my COUSIN!! Some fresh coffee too. Jus leave it outside the room. Gitty-up boy. Up that chute. Hi-yah, Hep!

(Jack gives a weak laugh)

BEN

Get him outta those wet clothes!

KITTIE

That's a right good plan Ben. Wisht I thought of it.

(they are gone)

ELLIE

(in a threatening tone)

Stby Lx 19

Where's Bill?

BEN

Now Miss Ellie.

ELLIE

I ain't no "Miss" Ben. Where in thunderation is that flannel-mouthed jackass! Takin' a green-horn on a night drive through flood and fire –

BEN

You might pull in yer horns, Miss...Mam.

ELLIE

I'm a need 'em, Ben. Let me know when Bill decides to waltz in.



Bill ENT

Lx 19

(She storms off to the kitchen. Bill enters, wet and in a hurry. A practical working cattleman, he is experienced and usually calm, but has been through hell tonight. He carries a lantern which helps to light the space.)

BILL

Where's Jack?

BEN

Mr. McKay, if you don't want the lambasting of yer life, I'd head on outta here quick...

ELLIE

Is that Bill?!

BEN

Well, don't say I never warned ya!

(Ellie enters from kitchen)

BILL

Well, hello Eleanor. You look techy as a teased snake...

(Ellie throws the empty coffee pot at him. He ducks.)

Woe there. I ain't survived a terrifying ordeal from mother nature, only to receive a right tannin' in a supposedly civilized abode.

(she looks for something else to throw)

Ell, what the blazes?

ELLIE

You piece of prairie coal, you care more about your pockets than your hands, don't ya?

BILL

Is this about Jack?

ELLIE

And Ben and Hopple-head-Mike, an all the rest o' your hands. And *(she points to him)* loopy Bill McKay, ya thick-headed buffalo chip!

BILL

Ellie, now, pull in yer horns...

BEN

That's what I told her...

BILL

Ben, go on down to the pen and help pull those beeves in, before they bolt again in this lightnin'.

BEN

My pleasure Mr. McKay. I'd rather face them bulls.

(He runs off.)

BILL

Ellie, now, we were only two miles out, it didn't make sense to--

ELLIE

You might coulda been killed, Bill!

BILL

You worried about me?

ELLIE

Don't flatter yourself. It's only them poor boys who worship yer boots. They ain't saavy you got nothing under yer hat but hair.

BILL

I can mind my own men. I told Jack when he signed on--

ELLIE

--that you'd be drivin' in the midnight lightin'?!

BILL

--when he signed on, that if he was gonna learn the ropes, he had to stay sharp. He insisted on using that owl-headed horse of his...

ELLIE

Who let him!?

BILL

You're right, that's my fault. That creature looks everywhere but where he's goin'. I'll talk to the kid about it. Where ya got him stowed?

ELLIE

Kittie's tending him. Bill, your hands are bleedin'.

BILL

Rope burn. Right through my gloves. You're right, it wasn't the best plan. I took a gamble. These cattle...they're gonna be the death of me, but if I lose this herd...I'm done. The men can handle it. Ellie, that boy'll always be a useless tenderfoot if you two keep cooin' and coddlin' him.

ELLIE

He's been through a lot.

BILL

Yeah, he ain't had it *easy* like me and you. Boy could use a little of yer grit, Ell. Needs to see the Elephant, like the rest of us. A little disappointment, a little disillusion, givin' him some caution and discretion over things.

ELLIE

Bill, he's hardly seen a prairie dog let alone the damn Elephant.

BILL

You'd think he was yer sister, stead of a grown man. Leave my men to me. I gotta get back down to the pen. Just a few more months. I'm in debt to my ears, and these beeves is the only way out.

ELLIE

You're wet through yourself. You need outta them pants.

BILL

Shall I go up and see Kittie too?

ELLIE

Bill McKay! This ain't that sorta house and you know how I feel about jokes bein' made. She moved out of the Green Front, changed her ways. They're cousins!

(Kittie appears on the stairs)

BILL

Mm-hmm. That what Kittie tell ya? She's pullin' the sheer over yer eyes, Ell.

KITTIE

Oh hello Bill. Ellie, is that coffee comin' soon?

ELLIE

You come down yourself and get it. You got it backwards who works for who.

KITTIE

Mr. McKay, sir, Jack'll be spendin' the night. He's had a terrible time of it. I know how concerned you are for his welfare.

(Kittie leaves)

ELLIE

I'd better get some coffee and dinner for Jack. That girl never lifts a finger if she don't have to.

Stby Lx 23

BILL

Too busy liftin' her skirts.

Stby Sq 4

ELLIE

What's that? You leave Kittie to me.

BILL

And you leave Jack to me.

ELLIE

Right after we wring him out and warm him up with some coffee.

BILL

Hey, I notice you never offered me a cup o' that Arbuckle.

ELLIE

Jealously don't suit ya, Bill.

BILL

I best be goin'. Them steers need tendin' to.

(Bill heads to the door)

ELLIE

Come on now, you need out of them wet clothes, you'll catch yer death.

BILL

Naw, I hear it's not that sort of house. Wouldn't want to propagate no rumors. Night Eleanor.

ELLIE

At least let me tend that hand.

(But he is gone out into the lighting and thunder. She shouts after him.)

Be sure an don't fall off no cliff!

1 +

SQ 4

1 + 2 +

Lx 23