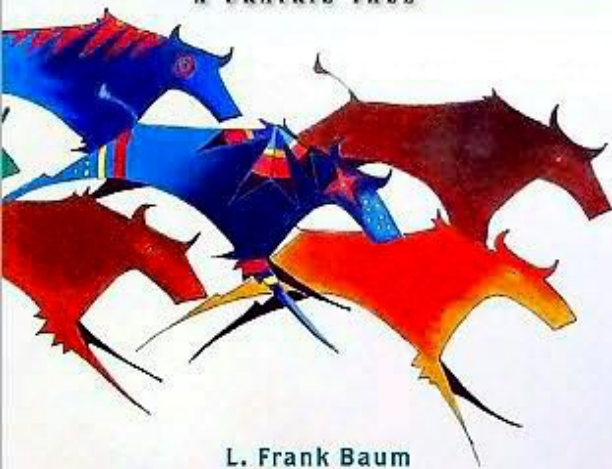


<sup>THE</sup>  
**ENCHANTED  
BUFFALO**

A PRAIRIE TALE



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# The Enchanted Buffalo

by

# L. Frank Baum

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This is a tale of the Royal Tribe of Okolom--those mighty I buffaloes that once dominated all the Western prairies, Seven hundred strong were the Okolom--great, shaggy creatures herding together and defying all enemies. Their range was well known to the Indians, to lesser herds of bisons and to all the wilds that roamed in the open; but none cared to molest or interfere with the Royal Tribe.

Dakt was the first King of the Okolom. By odds the fiercest and most intelligent of his race, he founded the Tribe, made the Laws that directed their actions and led his subjects through wars and dangers until they were acknowledged masters of the prairie.

Dakt had enemies, of course; even in the Royal Tribe. As he grew old it was whispered he was in league with Pagshat, the Evil Genius of the Prairies; yet few really believed the lying tale, and those Who did but feared King Dakt the more.

The days of this monarch were prosperous days for the Okolom. In Summer their feeding grounds were ever rich in succulent grasses; in Winter Dakt led them to fertile valleys in the shelter of the mountains.

But in time the great leader grew old and gray. He ceased quarreling and fighting and began to love peace--a sure sign that his days were numbered. Sometimes he would stand motionless for hours, apparently in deep thought. His dignity relaxed; he became peevish;

his eye, once shrewd and compelling, grew dim and glazed.

Many of the younger bulls, who coveted his Kingship, waited for Dakt to die; some patiently, and some impatiently. Throughout the herd there was an undercurrent of excitement. Then, one bright Spring morning, as the Tribe wandered in single file toward new feeding grounds, the old King lagged behind. They missed him, presently, and sent Barrag the Bull back over the hills to look for him. It was an hour before this messenger returned, coming into view above the swell of the prairie.

"The King is dead," said Barrag the Bull, as he walked calmly into the midst of the tribe. "Old age has at last overtaken him."

The members of the Okolom looked upon him curiously. Then one said: "There is blood upon your horns, Barrag. You did not wipe them well upon the grass."

Barrag turned fiercely "The old King is dead," he repeated. "Hereafter, I am the King!"

No one answered in words; but, as the Tribe pressed backward into a dense mass, four young bulls remained standing before Barrag, quietly facing the would-be King. He looked upon them sternly. He had expected to contend for his royal office. It was the Law that any of the Tribe might fight for the right to rule the Okolom. But it surprised him to find there were four who dared dispute his assertion that he was King.

Barrag the Bull had doubtless been guilty of a cowardly act in goring the feeble old King to his death. But he could fight; and fight he did. One after another the powerful young bulls were overthrown, while every member of the Tribe watched the great tournament with eager interest. Barrag was not popular with them, but they could not fail to

marvel at his prowess. To the onlookers he seemed inspired by unseen powers that lent him a strength fairly miraculous. They murmured together in awed tones, and the name of the dread Pagshat was whispered more than once.

As the last of the four bulls--the pride of half the Tribe--lay at the feet of the triumphant Barrag, the victor turned and cried aloud: "I am King of the Okolom! Who dares dispute my right to rule?"

For a moment there was silence. Then a fresh young voice exclaimed: "I dare!" and a handsome bull calf marched slowly into the space before Barrag and proudly faced him. A muttered protest swelled from the assemblage until it became a roar. Before it had subsided the young one's mother rushed to his side with a wail of mingled love and fear.

"No, no, Oknu!" she pleaded, desperately. "Do not fight, my child. It is death! See--Barrag is twice thy size. Let him rule the Okolom!"

"But I myself am the son of Dakt the King, and fit to rule in his place," answered Oknu, tossing his head with pride. "This Barrag is an interloper! There is no drop of royal blood in his veins."

"But he is nearly twice thy size!" moaned the mother, nearly frantic with terror. "He is leagued with the Evil Genius. To fight him means defeat and death!"

"He is a murderer!" returned the young bull, glaring upon Barrag. "He has killed his King, my father!"

"Enough!" roared the accused. "I am ready to silence this King's cub. Let us fight."

"No!" said an old bull, advancing from the herd. "Oknu shall not fight to-day. He is too young to face the mighty Barraq. But he will grow.

both in size and strength; and then, when he is equal to the contest, he may fight for his father's place among the Okolom. In the meantime we acknowledge Barrag our King!"

A shout of approval went up from all the Tribe, and in the confusion that followed the old Queen thrust her bold son out of sight amidst the throng.

Barrag was King. Proudly he accepted the acclaims of the Okolom--the most powerful Tribe of his race. His ambition was at last fulfilled; his plotting had met with success. The unnatural strength he had displayed had vanquished every opponent. Barrag was King.

Yet as the new ruler led his followers away from the field of conflict and into fresh pastures, his heart was heavy within him. He had not thought of Prince Oknu, the son of the terrible old King he had assisted to meet death. Oknu was a mere youth, half-grown and untried. Yet the look in his dark eyes as he had faced his father's murderer filled Barrag with a vague uneasiness. The youth would grow, and bade fair to become as powerful in time as old Dakt himself. And when he was grown he would fight for the leadership of the Okolom.

Barrag had not reckoned upon that.

When the moon came up, and the prairie was dotted with the reclining forms of the hosts of the Royal Tribe, the new King rose softly to his feet and moved away with silent tread. His pace was slow and stealthy until he had crossed the first rolling swell of the prairie; then he set off at a brisk trot that covered many leagues within the next two hours.

At length Barrag reached a huge rock that towered above the plain. It was jagged and full of rents and fissures, and after a moment's

hesitation the King selected an opening and stalked fearlessly into the black shadows. Presently the rift became a tunnel; but Barrag kept on, feeling his way in the darkness with his fore feet. Then a tiny light glimmered ahead, guiding him, and soon after he came into a vast cave hollowed in the centre of the rock. The rough walls were black as ink, yet glistened with an unseen light that shed its mellow but awesome rays throughout the cavern.

Here Barrag paused, saying in a loud voice:

"To thee, O Pagshat, Evil Genius of the Prairies, I give greeting! All has occurred as thou didst predict. The great Dakt is dead, and I, Barrag the Bull, am ruler of the Tribe of Okolom."

For a moment after he ceased the stillness was intense. Then a Voice, grave and deep, answered in the language of the buffaloes: "It is well!"

"But all difficulties are not yet swept aside," continued Barrag. "The old King left a son, an audacious young bull not half grown, who wished to fight me. But the patriarchs of the Tribe bade him wait until he had size and strength. Tell me, can the young Prince Oknu defeat me then?"

"He can," responded the Voice.

"Then what shall I do?" demanded the King. "Thou hast promised to make me secure in my power?"

"I promised only to make you King of the Tribe--and you are King. Farther than that, you must protect yourself," the Voice of the Evil Genius made answer. "But, since you are hereafter my slave, I will grant you one more favor--the power to remove your enemy by enchantment?"



"And how may I do that?" asked Barrag, eagerly.

"I will give you the means," was the reply. "Bow low thine head, and between the horns I will sprinkle a magical powder."

Barrag obeyed. "And now?" said he, inquiringly.

"Now," responded the unseen Voice, "mark well my injunctions. You must enchant the young Prince and transform him from a buffalo into some small and insignificant animal. Therefore, to-morrow you must choose a spring, and before any of the Tribe has drunk therein, shake well your head above the water, that the powder may sift down into the spring. At the same time centre your thoughts intently upon the animal into which you wish the Prince transformed. Then let him drink of the water in the spring, and the transformation on the instant will be accomplished?"

"That is very simple," said Barrag. "Is the powder now between my horns?"

"It is," answered the Voice.

"Then, farewell, O Pagshat!"

From the cavern of the Evil Genius the King felt his way through the passages until he emerged upon the prairie. Then, softly--that he might not disturb the powder of enchantment--he trotted back to the sleeping herd.

Just before he reached it a panther, slender, lithe and black as coal, bounded across his path, and with a quick blow of his hoof Barrag crushed in the animal's skull. "Panthers are miserable creatures," mused the King, as he sought his place among the slumbering buffaloes. "I think I shall transform young Oknu into a black panther?"

Secure in his great strength, he forgot that a full-grown panther is the most terrible foe known to his race.

At sunrise the King led the Royal Tribe of Okolom to a tiny spring that welled clear and refreshing from the centre of a fertile valley.

It is the King's right to drink first, but after bending his head above the spring and shaking it vigorously Barrag drew back, and turned to the others.

"Come! I will prove that I bear no ill will," said he, treacherously. "Prince Oknu is the eldest son of our dead but venerated King Dakt. It is not for me to usurp his rights. Prince Oknu shall drink first."

Hearing this, the patriarchs looked upon one another in surprise. It was not like Barrag the Bull to give way to another. But the Queen-mother was delighted at the favor shown her son, and eagerly pushed him forward. So Oknu advanced proudly to the spring and drank, while Barrag bent his thoughts intently upon the black panther.

An instant later a roar of horror and consternation came from the Royal Tribe; for the form of Prince Oknu had vanished, and in its place crouched the dark form of a trembling, terrified panther.

Barrag sprang forward. "Death to the vermin!" he cried, and raised his cloven hoof to crush in the panther's skull.

A sudden spring, a flash through the air, and the black panther alighted upon Barrag's shoulders. Then its powerful jaws closed over the buffalo's neck, pressing the sharp teeth far into the flesh.

With a cry of pain and terror the King reared upright, striving to shake off his tormentor; but the panther held fast. Again Barrag reared, whirling this way and that, his eyes staring, his breath quick and

short, his great body trembling convulsively.

The others looked on fearfully. They saw the King kneel and roll upon the grass; they saw him arise with his foe still clinging to his back with claw and tooth; they heard the moan of despair that burst from their stricken leader, and the next instant Barrag was speeding away across the prairie like an arrow fresh from a bow, and his bellows of terror grew gradually fainter as he passed from their sight.

The prairie is vast. It is lonely, as well. A vulture, resting on outstretched wings, watched anxiously the flight of Bar-rag the Bull as hour by hour he sped away to the southward--the one moving thing on all that great expanse.

The sun sank low and buried itself in the prairie's edge. Twilight succeeded, and faded into night. And still a black shadow, leap by leap, sprang madly through the gloom. The jackals paused, listening to the short, quick pants of breath--the irregular hoof-beats of the galloping bull. But while they hesitated the buffalo passed on, with the silent panther still crouched upon its shoulders.

In the black night Barrag suddenly lifted up his voice. "Come to me, O Pagshat--Evil Genius that thou art--come to my rescue!" he cried.

And presently it seemed that another dark form rushed along beside his own.

"Save me, Pagshat!" he moaned. "Crush thou mine enemy, and set me free!"

A cold whisper reached him in reply: "I cannot!"

"Change him again into his own form," panted Barrag; "hark ye, Pagshat: 'tis the King's son--the cub--the weakling! Disenchant him, ere he proves my death!"

Again came the calm reply, like a breath of Winter sending a chill to his very bones: "I cannot."

Barrag groaned, dashing onward--ever onward.

"When you are dead," continued the Voice, "Prince Oknu will resume his own form. But not before?"

"Did we not make a compact?" questioned Barrag, in despairing tone.

"We did," said the Evil Genius, "and I have kept my pact. But you have still to fulfil a pledge to me."

"At my death--only at my death, Pagshat!" cried the bull, trembling violently.

A cruel laugh was the only response. The moon broke through a rift in the clouds, flooding the prairie with silver light. The Evil Genius had disappeared, and the form of the solitary buffalo, with its clinging, silent foe, stumbled blindly across the endless plains.

Barrag had bargained with the Evil One for strength, and the strength of ten bulls was his. The legends do not say how many days and nights the great buffalo fled across the prairies with the black panther upon his shoulders. We know that the Utes saw him, and the Apaches, for their legends tell of it. Far to the south, hundreds of miles away, lived the tribe of the Comanches; and those Indians for many years told their children of Barrag the Bull, and how the Evil Genius of the Prairies, having tempted him to sin, betrayed the self-made King and abandoned him to the vengeance of the Black Panther, who was the enchanted son of the murdered King Dakt.

The strength of ten bulls was in Barraaq; but even that could not

endure forever. The end of the wild run came at last, and as Barrag fell lifeless upon the prairie the black panther relaxed its hold and was transformed into its original shape. For the enchantment of the Evil Genius was broken, and, restored to his own proper form, Prince Oknu cast one last glance upon his fallen enemy and then turned his head to the north.

It would be many moons before he could rejoin the Royal Tribe of the Okolom.

Since King Barrag had left them in his mad dash to the southward the Royal Tribe had wandered without a leader. They knew Oknu, as the black panther, would never relax his hold on his father's murderer; but how the strange adventure might end all were unable to guess.

So they remained in their well-known feeding grounds and patiently awaited news of the absent ones.

A full year had passed when a buffalo bull was discovered one day crossing the prairie in the direction of the Okolom. Dignity and pride was in his step; his glance was fearless, but full of wisdom. As he stalked majestically to the very centre of the herd his gigantic form towered far above that of any buffalo among them.

A stillness fraught with awe settled upon the Royal Tribe. "It is old King Dakt, cope to life again!" finally exclaimed one of the patriarchs.

"Not so," answered the newcomer, in a clear voice; "but it is the son of Dakt—who has avenged his father's death. Look upon me! I am Oknu, King of the Royal Tribe of Okolom. Dares any dispute my right to rule?"

No voice answered the challenge. Instead, every head of the seven

hundred was bowed in silent homage to Oknu the son of Dakt, the first King of the Okolom.

# THE END



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