

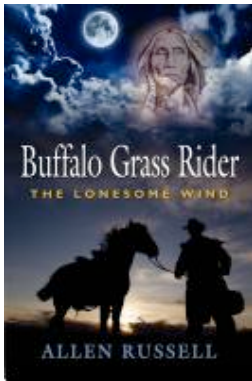


# Buffalo Grass Rider

THE LONESOME WIND



ALLEN RUSSELL



*The Lonesome Wind* is episode one of the **Buffalo Grass Rider Series**. It chronicles the story of Bolton Ashton. Born in 1829 among the green hills of Tennessee, Bolt shares a distant ancestral link to a savage Cherokee warrior. Despite his seemingly quiet nature, Bolt struggles to control the warrior spirit dwelling within him. This journey takes him to Gettysburg, the rolling plains of Texas, and, finally, the vast buffalo grass ranges of Montana.

# Buffalo Grass Rider

## The Lonesome Wind

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Bolt's hand moved to the big .44 as two pulsing veins popped out on his forehead. Bodine had finally crossed the threshold and Bolt's warrior spirit was raging to get out.

"You make one move toward that barn and I'll kill all of you."

"Big talk for a man alone," Bodine said. In the twilight, he failed to notice Bolt was armed. The overseer thought he was invincible as he looked back to his men and motioned toward the barn, "Burn it to the ground."

Having despised Bodine for a long time, Bolt never hesitated. The quiet country evening was shattered with a roar and a flash of flame. The demon spirit was unleashed on the world as Bolt's first bullet ripped through the startled overseer's chest, driving him off the back of his horse.

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First Edition



# Buffalo Grass Rider

Episode One:

The Lonesome Wind

Allen Russell



## **Chapter One: 1835, Making of the Man**

The relaxed chatter that filled the Walton Inn only a moment before was now replaced with a tense silence. Nearly everyone in the dining room turned to look at the two shabbily dressed backwoodsmen suddenly filling the doorway. One of them was huge with broad shoulders. The other was shorter and lightly built. Both had shaggy black hair, long beards, and an aroma that suggested a complete lack of personal hygiene.

Standing on the threshold, they seemed to be scanning the crowded room, carefully searching for any lurking danger. Finally satisfied all was well, their attention fell on the only table with empty chairs. It was occupied by an older gentleman eating alone near the center of the dining room.

“Oh no, not today,” Sarah Ashton whispered, watching the pair in the doorway. An attractive young woman in her late twenties, Sarah was a farmer’s wife who worked at the Walton Inn a few days a week to bring in a little extra money for her family.

When the backwoodsmen started toward his table, the older gentleman quickly got to his feet, abandoned his unfinished meal and faded into the shadows. Ignoring the former occupant, the backwoodsmen made themselves comfortable at the table and started looking around for someone to wait on them.

“What do you have to do to get some service in here?” the big one bellowed, slamming an enormous fist down on the table to emphasize his impatience. The smaller one seemed content to pick at the remaining scraps on the plate in front of him.

“I’ll be right there,” Sarah said from across the room.

It was late October, 1835, in Smith County, Tennessee. The Inn was located near a bustling ferry landing on the Cumberland Turnpike. The turnpike, or Walton’s Road, was the main wagon trail connecting Knoxville to Nashville and the Natchez Trace.

The Inn was packed with weary travelers. Tired and nearing the end of a long day, Sarah was still scurrying around, trying to take care of several tables at once. As much as she wanted to, she didn't have the option of avoiding the men at the table. It was her job to wait on them.

When she approached them with a crock of beer and two mugs, the younger man began leering at her and making suggestions that she tried to ignore. When she got around to the big one, he grabbed her at the waist and pulled her down on his lap. Sarah was used to a little teasing now and then from her customers, but she couldn't stand to have this man put his hands on her.

"Let go of me," she demanded as she resisted his primitive advances.

The big man continued holding her down as his companion laughed and clapped at his antics. Sarah turned her head to avoid the odor of old sweat and his horrendous breath.

"Now, Ms. Sarah," the big man said, his tangled black hair covering one eye, "We just want a little company, don't be so uppity." Due to his immense bulk, the big hillbilly was breathing hard from the exertion of holding onto Sarah. His broad grin revealed widely-spaced teeth, stained brown from the ever-present plug of tobacco in his cheek.

"Take your hands off me," she repeated, still struggling to get away from him. There was little Sarah could do alone, and none of the other patrons in the place would even look over at her, much less, try to interfere.

The big man holding Sarah was well-known hell-raiser, Ollie Drinkwater. Ollie had been involved with several brutal beatings and rumored to be responsible for a killing or two in the backwoods. He carried a big bone-handled knife that he wasn't bashful about using. Anyone foolish enough to come to Sarah's rescue would likely get their throat cut for the effort.

Standing more than six feet tall and weighing well over 300 pounds, Ollie was the self-anointed leader of the Drinkwater Clan. The smaller man was Ollie's younger and slightly unstable brother, Saul.

Timber cutters and whiskey makers, the Drinkwater's lived in a ramshackle cabin back in Panther Holler with their widowed mother



and half-a-hundred hogs. They were bachelors and likely always would be, as no woman in her right mind would go anywhere near that holler.

The entire population of Panther Holler consisted of Drinkwater's, aunts, uncles, and second and third cousins. That lack of outside bloodlines and the constant ingestion of moonshine whiskey had evidently been a problem for several generations of Drinkwater's. Most of them were severely lacking in the social graces.

Sarah's young son, Bolt, along with her nephew, Sam Boston, was sitting outside with a mule-drawn cart waiting to escort her home. Bolt Ashton was sitting astride the mule in front of Sam. Neither of them wanted to be seen riding in the cart, it was for Sarah.

"Help me down," Bolt said when he heard his mother's excited voice coming from inside.

"We ain't supposed to go in there," Sam said.

Ignoring the warning, Bolt held on to the mule's collar, swung his leg over, and dropped to the ground. Sam climbed off and reluctantly followed the young Ashton toward the Inn. Sam was bigger than Bolt, but he was the quiet one of this pair. Both little country boys were dressed in overalls and barefooted.

When Bolt came through the door he saw his mother struggling to get away from Ollie. The little boy's brow wrinkled up as two bulging veins popped out on his forehead and his face got red.

Like a lot of Tennesseans, Bolt had Cherokee blood running through his veins. The spirit of the blood in Bolt, however, was very different from that of the rest. The savage warrior spirit in him had lain dormant for many generations, patiently waiting for the proper vessel. The ancient curse had been awakened when Bolt was conceived.

Even at his tender age, Bolt had a terrible temper and a mouth that kept him in trouble much of the time. The little Ashton was stubborn and hardheaded. He was only too happy to take on anything or anybody that got in his way. The fiery little warrior knew the Drinkwater's, but he wasn't afraid of them, and he wasn't about to stand by and watch his mother get mistreated by some giant hillbilly and his dim-witted brother.

Ollie wore bulky homemade trousers that his mother sewed for him. Held up by suspenders, those trousers were always gapped open in the back or on the sides.

No one noticed the little boys when they came through the door. The patrons were all watching Ollie. Looking around for a weapon, Bolt motioned to Sam and made his way over to the corner of the room.

There, next to the pot-bellied stove, they found a neatly stacked rick of stove-wood. Leaning against the stove-wood was a broom and a small scoop shovel used to clean out the ashes. Bolt scooped up a shovelful of red hot coals from the open stove while Sam picked up a sturdy hickory stick from the stack.

When the boys got close enough, Bolt emptied the scoop down the back of the big Drinkwater's pants. Everybody in the place jumped when Ollie exploded out of his chair with a shriek. In his haste to get away from whatever had him by the seat of the pants, Ollie leapt to his feet, throwing Sarah to the floor and turned the table over on Saul.

Just as Ollie started doing a jig to shake the coals out of his britches, Sam cracked him on the shin with the stick. When Ollie grabbed for his throbbing shin, the burning coals skittered down his other leg, setting his homemade woolen pants to smoldering and came to rest in his left boot. Ollie was hopping up and down, trying to shake the fire out of his pants, when he realized his foot was burning. Ollie made the mistake of bending over to yank his boot off, and Sam cold-cocked him. The hickory stick smacked Ollie's forehead with a hollow thump, knocking the big man backwards onto his ponderous smoldering backside.

The whole place shook when Ollie went down on his butt. Nearly blinded from the blow to his forehead, Ollie was still on his back holding his throbbing head, and cursing the two little warriors. Saul was no help, he was howling with laughter along with nearly everyone else in the Inn.

"You leave my mother alone, Pig Farmer," Bolt warned, waving the scoop shovel under the big man's nose.

"Your Mother!" Ollie shouted, "Why you little...I'm gonna wring your neck!"

*Buffalo Grass Rider*

Still in the floor, Ollie went for his knife. The little warriors weren't dumb; they had freed Sarah from the big hillbilly's grasp. When the knife came out, they figured this was about to get serious and it was time to go. Dropping their weapons, Bolt and Sam headed for the door. Ollie struggled to his feet as they disappeared through the open doorway.

"I'm gonna skin both of you little son's o' . . ."

Sarah tried to grab Ollie's arm, but the raging hillbilly brushed her off like a gnat.

Bolt was running for his life when he crossed the front porch of the Inn. Still looking back over his shoulder, he ran smack into a man that had just ridden up and tied his horse to the rail. Sam was right behind Bolt and crashed into both of them.

"Whoa," the stranger said, catching the boys in his arms, "where you boys going in such an all-fired hurry?"

Before they could answer, Ollie came hobbling out the door, wearing only one boot. His pants were still smoking and a big purple lump was growing on his forehead. Saul was right behind him, anxious to watch Ollie skin the brazen little kids. Bolt and Sam instinctively went around behind the stranger for protection.

The stranger held a Kentucky long-rifle at arm's length, blocking Ollie from the boys. "Whoa...hold on there. You boys kind o' got these youngsters outnumbered."

"This is none...of your...affair," Ollie gasped.

"I think your britches are on fire, friend," the stranger said. He was grinning when he said it, but Ollie wasn't even slightly amused.

"Get out of my way...or you'll taste this blade...before they do."

The stranger's grin began to fade when Sarah got to the porch. She tried to get around Ollie until Saul grabbed her and pushed her back.

The stranger facing Ollie wasn't a big man but he had a commanding presence. He was dressed in buckskins and wore a wide-brimmed hat. In addition to the long-rifle, there was a knife and a steel tomahawk in his belt. The four buckskin-clad men with him were watching from the hitching rail near their horses.

"I'm sorry to hear you say that," the stranger said. Before Ollie could carry through with his threat, the stranger lashed out and stuck him with the butt of the rifle. The stunned hillbilly was trying to keep his feet as blood began pouring from his nose and lip. In anticipation of what he knew was coming, the stranger pulled his tomahawk. Bolt and Sam scattered as Ollie shook his head, wiped his nose on his sleeve, and lunged at the stranger with a roar.

The nimble stranger side-stepped the rumbling hillbilly and struck him in the back of the head with the flat side of the tomahawk. Ollie went off the porch, landed face-first in the dirt and stayed there. He wasn't dead but he would have a skull-busting headache and a few scars to remember the stranger by when he woke up.

After seeing Ollie go down, Saul pulled his knife and began circling, looking for an opportunity to thrust his blade and let some of the wind out of the impudent stranger. When Saul lunged, the stranger hit him across the hand with his tomahawk, cutting off Saul's little finger and knocking the knife from his grasp.

Saul had a confused look on his face as he studied his suddenly-separated appendage lying there on the porch. Before he could figure it all out, the flat side of the tomahawk whacked him just above the left ear, and Saul toppled over to sleep it off next to his brother.

"Colonel," one of the men at the rail said, "danged if we ain't been here less than two minutes and you already started a fight."

"I never started no fight." Using the toe of his boot, he flicked the severed finger off the porch. "It was these two rascals," he said, turning back to Bolt and Sam. The men at the rail were all laughing. "Are you alright, ma'am?" the stranger asked Sarah.

"I'm fine, thank you."

"You boys hungry?" the stranger asked Bolt and Sam.

"Yes sir," they said together.

"Well, you all come on in and join us, but don't pick on anybody else, I'm plumb tuckered out." They were all laughing as they started for the door. Before he went inside, the stranger picked up the knives dropped by the Drinkwater's.

*Buffalo Grass Rider*

When they were seated, Sarah came back to their table. "I want to thank you, Sir. I was afraid for my son there. No one here wanted to help us."

"This is your boy?" the stranger asked. "Well, he's a ring-tailed wildcat to take on those two."

"The boys were trying to save me from those two hillbillies."

"I'm mighty glad to know you, Son," the stranger said sticking out his hand. "What's your name?"

"Bolt Ashton, this here's my cousin, Sam Boston."

"Well, Bolt, Sam, it's good to meet you both."

"I'm Mrs. Ashton," Sarah said, "Mr. . . ."

"Crockett, ma'am...David Crockett."

"You're Davy Crockett?" Bolt asked.

"That's right, Son, fresh from the backwoods. I'm half horse, half alligator, with just a touch of snapping turtle thrown in. I got the fastest horse, the prettiest sister, and the ugliest dog in Tennessee. I can wade the Mississippi, leap the Ohio, ride a streak of lightning, and skin down a honey locust with nary a scratch."

The boys were laughing along with everyone in the place at this backwoods legend.

"Do you know Andy Jackson?" Sam asked.

"Know him? I was just with Old Hickory himself up there in Washington City. It hasn't been but a few months ago. Let me tell you about the time me and Andy fought the Creeks. It all started when. . . ."

Bolt and Sam were spellbound for the next two hours listening to Davy carry on with his stories. It was getting close to dark and long past time to go home when Sarah finally called a halt to the storytelling.

"So long, boys," Davy said.

"Will we see you around here again?" Bolt asked.

"Not for a spell. I'm gone to the buffalo grass."

"Where's that?"

"West, Son...Texas. There's land out there for a man to stretch out in. A vast plain, grass as far as you can see, from Texas clear on up to Canada. The Indians call it the buffalo grass and I want to ride across it."

Besides, things are getting a little too crowded and tame around here for me."

"I've been thinking the same thing," Bolt said. "Think I'll go ride that buffalo grass with you."

"Bolt, you're my kind of boy," Davy said with a grin. "We'd be proud to have you. You fight just like me; I always hit the big one first."

"Yes sir," Bolt said, "Me too."

"How old are you?" Davy asked.

"I'm almost eight."

"He's seven," Sam said, "I'm eight."

"In that case," Davy said, "I think you better stay here and watch out for your mamma a little longer before you go wandering off to see the west."

"Yes sir, I reckon you're right," Bolt replied, "but I'm gonna ride that buffalo grass myself one of these days." Crockett and the men with him all laughed at the little Tennessee scrapper.

Bolt and Sam were headed to the door when Davy called them back.

"Boys, I want you to have these." He picked up the knife that belonged to Ollie and handed it to Bolt and gave the other one to Sam. "Now if anybody ever asked you boys where you got those knives, you can tell 'em, David Crockett himself gave 'em to you."

"Thank you, Colonel Crockett," Sarah said, "that means so much."

"You're welcome ma'am. They're good boys; I suspect they'll grow up to be something real special."

By the spring of 1846, Bolt Ashton was in his late teens and growing into a fine looking young man. He was well passed the six foot mark, and Cousin Sam was two inches taller. Bolt went to school long enough to learn to read and write. He was a student of American history, reading all he could about the explorers, mountain men, and frontier scouts.

Andrew Jackson died the year before and Davy Crockett died at the Alamo only a few months after meeting Bolt at the Inn. Even

though he had been just a kid, Bolt could still remember Crockett's fun-loving ways.

The knife Davy had given him was Bolt's prized possession. He had the local saddle maker create a leather sheath for it. It was inscribed: *A gift from Davy Crockett, October, 1835.*

Bolt was happy working his parent's farm, but he was getting to the age that he wanted to see more of the world. He read about Lewis and Clark and the wonders they found in the west. He remembered Crockett telling him about the buffalo grass.

The young Ashton was thinking seriously about heading out on his own. The one thing holding him back was Ms. Carrie Lynn Morgan. Carrie Lynn was the prettiest thing Bolt ever laid eyes on. He would see her at church on Sunday and occasionally around the small town where he lived.

Her father, Michael Morgan, arrived from Great Britain years before with lots of old family money and made good. In addition to his hired hands, Morgan owned more than twenty slaves that worked his sprawling bottomland farm.

Bolt had spoken to Carrie Lynn at times after church and they gradually became a little more than friends. Morgan, however, wasn't happy about Carrie Lynn getting too friendly with some hillbilly farm boy, having better things in mind for his daughter.

Bolt would ride out to her home on occasion, or Carrie Lynn would meet him in the woods down by the river. They would sit and talk for hours about the things Bolt was going to do.

The young Ashton was a tall handsome young man and Carrie Lynn was completely taken with him. Bolt wanted to go west as soon as he could, but Carrie Lynn was happy right where she was. She was wealthy and stood to inherit a big piece of land. In spite of many a heated debate about the frontier, their romance blossomed.

Lying awake at night, Bolt often wondered if she could be the one thing to keep him in Tennessee for the rest of his life. He wanted to see the frontier, but giving her up would be too high a price to pay for his wanderlust.

On one of his many visits, Bolt met a young black man that was one of Morgan's slaves. His name was Ezekiel. He was roughly Bolt's age and over time they became somewhat friendly. Bolt was the first white person that ever talked with Ezekiel instead of talking down to him. Bolt discovered, the young slave wasn't much different than himself.

Ezekiel couldn't get away from the back-breaking labor of the farm very often, but when he could, he would go fishing down at the river with Bolt. They would talk about many things. Bolt would go on and on about the western frontier and Ezekiel would listen attentively. Freedom to roam, however, was something a slave could only dream about.

One hot evening, Bolt and Ezekiel were walking back through Morgan's fields toward the slave quarters when Morgan's overseer, Dan Bodine, and several men on horseback, rode up and confronted them.

"Where you been, Boy?" Bodine was from Georgia and he wielded a heavy hand over his charges, feeding his self-esteem by beating on the bodies and spirits of the blacks.

"Just down to the river, Sir," Ezekiel answered with his head down, knowing better than to look Bodine in the eye.

"You got no business at that river, Boy. Maybe I better find some more work for you to do."

"No sir, I got plenty of work to do."

"We're looking for some runaway Alabama darkies," Bodine said, "You see anybody like that?"

"No sir, Mister Dan."

"You're lying to me, Boy. You seen 'em, didn't you."

"No sir, Mister Dan. I ain't seen nobody."

"We were just fishing," Bolt said.

"I didn't ask you," Bodine said without looking at Bolt. He picked up the braided leather whip draped over his saddle horn and let it uncoil. "Boy, you better get for home and right now."

"There's no need for that," Bolt said. His wrinkled brow and two bulging veins on his forehead were signs the warrior spirit was stirring in his blood.



Still ignoring Bolt, Bodine lashed the whip across Ezekiel's back. Wincing in pain at the crack of the whip, Ezekiel began to run towards his family's cabin. Bodine turned back to lash out at Bolt, but the hotheaded young Ashton was already moving.

Despite the overseer's suddenly retreating horse, Bolt managed to get hold of Bodine's coat and drag him out of the saddle. As soon as they were both on the ground, Bolt jerked the unhorsed overseer up and hit him with a hard right fist.

Bodine was back on the ground spitting blood from his busted lip when his companions jumped Bolt. There were five of them and they gave Bolt a bad beating. Before they finished, they held Bolt against a white oak, while Bodine gave him several lashes with the whip.

"Don't ever come back here," Bodine warned as he struggled back on his horse, "I'll kill you next time."

Bolt got up from the ground and stumbled away toward home. His shirt was bloody where his back was laid open from the whip. Bolt stopped at a creek to wash it out before going home. He knew his father would kill Bodine if he ever found out about the lashing.

Enraged and humiliated by the whipping, Bolt never told anyone about it, not even Sam. Bolt vowed he would never be beaten like that again by anyone. He would carry the emotional and physical scars of that whipping for the rest of his life. For one awful moment, he experienced the terror the slaves in the south must have dealt with all of their lives.

Bolt heard later that Bodine found the escaped Alabama slaves hiding in the trees along the river. The overseer killed their leader and left him hanging from a limb, but only after shooting him five times. Even though Bolt was still young, his hatred for Morgan, Bodine, and the institution of slavery was growing with each passing day.

The next Sunday morning, Bolt and his parents were at church. Sam was there and the boys sat in the back row. They wanted to be the first one's out the door after services, so they could get to the creek and go swimming.

The Reverend Thomas Gage was delivering the sermon. Mr. and Mrs. Morgan and Carrie Lynn, along with Dan Bodine and his wife, were sitting down front in their own private box. It was a step up from the main floor on the preacher's right.

The Reverend had been preaching there for as long as most of the children could remember. He was a big man with long white hair and a ponderous beard. Despite his years, he possessed a thunderous voice. An imposing figure looking down from his elevated pulpit, the Reverend Gage was much feared by the young people in the congregation.

Preaching from the book of Exodus, Reverend Gage proclaimed the mighty victory Moses brought about in freeing the Israelites from the Egyptians. Bolt was sitting quietly, listening to the sermon. When he finally heard all he could stand he said something to Sam and the Reverend saw him.

When Reverend Gage paused in mid-sentence, an oppressive silence fell over the meeting house. The Reverend thought he'd teach Bolt a lesson by calling him out in front of the whole congregation. Reverend Gage figured he'd embarrass Bolt and the young Ashton would shrink before him. Grasping the lapel on his long black coat, Gage glared down at Bolt.

"If you have something to add, young Mr. Ashton, perhaps you'd like to share it with all of us."

Much to the Reverend's dismay, Bolt started to get to his feet.

"I'll be glad to share it with you, Reverend." With his strong voice filling the room, the entire congregation turned to look his way. Bolt was still swollen and bruised from the beating he had taken from Bodine and his men. "You say Moses was a great man?"

"He was chosen by God to lead the Israelite slaves out of the bondage of Egypt." The Reverend said it in a loud voice, looking around as if to imply everyone over the age of twelve should know that.

"And that was a good thing?"

"Of course, it was God's will they be free."

"Then why haven't you ever said anything about the slaves in bondage right up the road at Morgan's?"

Hearing that, the congregation began to mumble among themselves. Michael Morgan turned bright red, but he didn't say anything. Carrie Lynn had her head down, trying to hide the smile creeping across her lips.

"Well, that's...different," Gage said, his voice lacking the thunder of a moment before. He was struggling, trying to find the right words to explain. Morgan was the church's biggest financial supporter. "The Israelite's were...God's people."

"Didn't you say, just last week, we're all God's children, created in his own image?"

"Well, yes...but...not the darkies."

"Where does it say that in the book?"

"Well, it's not really in the scriptures...not in so many words...but...."

"Then you, Reverend, are a hypocrite and a liar!"

The crowd gasped when Bolt said that. Bodine got to his feet and started down the center aisle with a couple of men. They planned to remove Bolt from the building by force, but stopped short when Sam stood up.

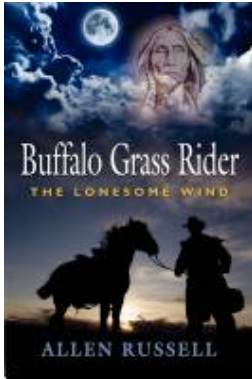
"You best sit back down, Overseer. Or you'll be the one taking this beating."

The Reverend Gage tried to regain control.

"If that's the way you feel, Bolt, maybe you should just leave."

"I am leaving, and I'll never darken the door of this place again."

As Sam followed Bolt out the door, the crowd sat in stunned silence and watched them go. The Reverend was sweating, trying to think of something to say. Bolt's mother was in tears. Many a member of that congregation had thought it, but the hardheaded young Ashton was the first one to ever say it out loud.



*The Lonesome Wind* is episode one of the **Buffalo Grass Rider Series**. It chronicles the story of Bolton Ashton. Born in 1829 among the green hills of Tennessee, Bolt shares a distant ancestral link to a savage Cherokee warrior. Despite his seemingly quiet nature, Bolt struggles to control the warrior spirit dwelling within him. This journey takes him to Gettysburg, the rolling plains of Texas, and, finally, the vast buffalo grass ranges of Montana.

# Buffalo Grass Rider

## The Lonesome Wind

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