

BUNYAN'S BODY

or

MINNESOTA

BOOK, MUSIC AND LYRICS

BY ED VALENTINE

**[TO READ THE COMPLETE SCRIPT, OR TO INQUIRE ABOUT RIGHTS,
PLEASE E-MAIL ED@EDVALENTINE.COM.]**

SETTING:

Big Spoon, Minnesota - The town that has sprung up around Paul Bunyan's lumber camp.

CHARACTERS:

- SALLY ANN:** "The Rooster Girl." An 11-year old girl. A little slow. Always wears a winter hat.
(Should be played by a small adult actress.)
- POPPER and MAM:** Her parents. A lumberjack family.
- ODE SOYL:** A mysterious drifter.
- PREACHER LUTEFISK:** The town's minister. Stuck up.
- BETTY LUTEFISK:** The prettiest girl in Big Spoon. Also, the Preacher's Daughter.
- JOHNNY INKSLINGER:** Bunyan's bookkeeper. Inkstained.
- SOURDOUGH SAM:** The old lumberyard cook, who now supervises the kitchen. Has one arm, one leg, one ear, one eye and one lip.
- THE SVENSON BROTHERS:** Cooks for the lumber camp.
- OLAF** - Wears a white beard. The oldest, kindhearted and gentle.
- SVEN** – Wears a twirly black mustache. The middle brother, rough, hard, crude.
- CLEM** – Clean-shaven. The youngest, an innocent very much like SALLY ANN. Like her, too, he always wears a knitted winter hat.

PLAYED BY PUPPETS:

- **THE SEVEN ELMERS:** Bunyan's favorite axemen - seven long-bearded giants, all named "Elmer." Played by cast members wearing giant puppet bodies.
- **FOREST CRITTERS, CROWS, BIRDS AND BEES, THE SUN**
- **BABE, THE BLUE OX**
- ...and **PAUL BUNYAN:** Seen only in shadow.

The actor playing POPPER also plays PAUL BUNYAN.

The actor playing MAM also plays THE PATCHWORK ANGEL.

The play could be performed with 11 actors, if the actors double as Lumberjacks, Townspeople, Forest Critters, Crows, and Elmers whenever necessary.

ORDER OF SCENES

Part I: BIG SPOON

1. Bruises
2. The Grand Tour / The Ballad of Paul Bunyan
3. The Wakin' Up Song
4. A Jeremiad
5. Lumberman's Breakfast
6. On Learning
7. Smokes 'n' Such
8. End of the Day
9. Universal Squirrel
10. Second Awakenings
11. Birds 'N' Bees
12. Won't Night Never Come? (Street / Kitchen / Woods)
13. Fiddlin' & Dancin'
14. Sugar
15. Blue Moon

Part II: BUNYAN'S BODY

16. Can't Eat Your Thumb
17. He Puts the Fun in Funeral
18. Ya Shoulda Seen This Comin'
19. The Hilltop
20. Digging
21. The Great Horned Turkey
22. A Blizzard and An Angel
23. A Glistening
24. A Christening

BUNYAN'S BODY, Part I: BIG SPOON

SCENE 1: BRUISES

AT RISE: Night. A small cabin. Tall trees upstage. Behind the trees, the sky is a violent purple color. The moon is hidden behind clouds. A girl in an oversized, crazy colored patchwork Pioneer dress stands in a little patch of moonflowers and looks up at the sky. She wears a knitted winter cap and men's boots, all much too big for her. She holds a little shovel. This is SALLY ANN. Her MAM and POPPER enter and stand with their backs to her, looking upstage at the sky. MAM is pregnant. A fiddler plays under the following.

SALLY ANN

The sky turned purple tonight, purple like a bruise. Purple-black and midnight blue, though midnight weren't there yet. I called my Popper and Mam to look out.

MAM (To POPPER:)

Bruisey sky. You know what that could mean.

SALLY ANN (To us:)

Do YOU? 'Cause I don't.

POPPER (To MAM:)

How's the moon?

MAM

Don't know yet. I'm a-waiting.

SALLY ANN

Popper?

POPPER

Sally Ann?

SALLY ANN

What's it all mean?

POPPER

You're too little to know.

SALLY ANN (To us:)

A mystery. And, look: the moon done hid herself behind the curtain, too shy to come out. But Popper and Mam, they stood in front of the cabin with a hand on each of mine, and we waited for the moon. The clouds was heavy heavy paper with a skinny

SALLY ANN (cont'd)

skinny edge. And we waited. Then, in a sudden: there's a lightening of the sky, light shining through a paper, and the sky begins to brighten and my folks both give a gasp! They hold my hands hard, Mam and Popper, both of them SQUEEZE my hands like their hands are wrenches, they squeeze me something fierce, when - oop! Here comes the moon! Howdy there and show yourself!

(From behind a cloud comes a bright golden moon.)

And she shows herself yellow, above the tops of the trees, still shrouding herself a little in smoke. And my folks cheer, really give a whoop. And all over the valley, I can hear the townsfolk cheer. Why do they cheer to see the moon so gold? It's pretty, I grant you, but why?

(A terrible sound: an earthshaking moan, as if a whole mountain is ill.)

That's when I hear him moan. My folks' glee is over then, and hush-like, they start a-mumblin' and a-bustlin' and a-heading back indoors.

POPPER

It could be nothin'. Nothin' at all.

MAM

Well, I don't like it a-tall. Let's go. Let's GO, Sally Ann. It's soggy out here and you're too little to be up so late.

(Exits with POPPER into the cabin.)

SALLY ANN

But somethin's UP. Somethin's in the air. I heard Big Paul moan. I felt how hard my folks done held my hands. I got the bruises to prove it. See? Hey, POPPER! MAM!

(POPPER and MAM come running out of the cabin.)

POPPER

What? What in tarnation?

SALLY ANN

I planted some moonflowers. Ain't they purty and all?

(POPPER shakes his head and goes back into the cabin.)

MAM

Your Popper's overworked, baby. Come on in to bed.

(Goes back into the cabin. SALLY ANN throws down the shovel.)

SALLY ANN

Well, nobody tells me NOTHING. Guess kids is the last to know.

(She exits. Lights fade.)

SCENE 2: THE GRAND TOUR

SOUND: In the darkness, whistling wind and the sound of drums or thunder. A deep voice intones a mournful song.

BUNYAN'S VOICE

THE HILLS AND THE MOUNTAINS, THE HILLS AND THE MOUNTAINS
THE HILLS AND THE MOUNTAINS: THE MOUNTAINS!

(Silence.)

LIGHTS UP: Nearly dawn. Same place - the cabin in the woods before the backdrop of tall trees. The fog lies heavy above the treetops.

An ancient, decrepit man crawls up from a hole in the stage. He carries a sack. He crawls towards the shovel SALLY ANN threw at the end of the last scene. THIS is ODE SOYL. He grabs the shovel and motions to us, puts his finger to his lips.

ODE SOYL

ShhhHHH!

(He listens. The deep voice intones again.)

BUNYAN'S VOICE

CAN A MAN BE A MOUNTAIN? CAN A MOUNTAIN BE A MAN?

(ODE SOYL hears a noise from the cabin. He skitters off, dropping the shovel as SALLY ANN enters from the cabin. She skips in, humming, carrying an old leather box. She sees us. Stops.)

SALLY ANN

You think I'm small? I ain't so small. You never know: I'll grow!

(Tries to grow. Stretches, grunts and groans.)

First thing every day I streeeeetch up to the sky. Even tried to sleep a-stretchin' from a ceiling beam but my Popper made me get down. Don't matter none. Popper can't stop me growin' - I'm gonna grow one way or t'other. First taller by a little. Then taller by a lot! Someday, I'm gonna be big, just like Big Paul. Why? 'Cuz if I was big, then folks might notice me. Even better, Paul might notice me. Might even ask me to the dance. You know, the end of summer Reels? They're a-comin' this Friday. Right now, Paul nor nobody don't pay me much mind on account of I'm small. You'll see - here come Paul's favorite axemen, the Seven Elmers.

(Seven giant men enter running: THE SEVEN ELMERS. They're each about 10 feet tall - lumberjack puppets with axes and beards hanging down to their knees.)

SALLY ANN (cont'd)

MORNIN', ELMER, ELMER, ELMER, ELMER, ELMER, ELMER, AND ELMER!

(The ELMERS circle SALLY ANN, then run past her and exit.)

See? Nobody pays me no mind. It don't get better in town, neither!

(The backdrop flies by as SALLY ANN runs in place. SALLY ANN points out the sights as they whiz past. Fiddle music up.)

Here we go now, gonna move fast! See the steeple on our Church? With the weathervane shaped like Babe, the Blue Ox? Paul done fixed the steeple on it hisself. Steeple's hinged so it can let the sun go past.

(PREACHER enters with a gigantic bible.)

Why, there's Preacher Lutefisk! Preacher Lutefisk, I'm prayin' and prayin'.

PREACHER LUTEFISK

That's good! What are you prayin' for?

SALLY ANN

I'm prayin' to grow as big as Paul.

PREACHER LUTEFISK

That's bad! Oh, Sally Ann. "Consider that lilies of the field" - who don't pray for foolish things!

SALLY ANN

But Paul never thinks nothin's foolish. Remember the time he got a million giant ants to help him do logging work? They was each two thousand pounds heavy and -

PREACHER LUTEFISK

You can stop there. I know that story.

SALLY ANN

Or the time when -

PREACHER LUTEFISK

I know that one too.

SALLY ANN

Oh, it don't matter. I got millions of Paul Bunyan stories. And they're all true! Every last one of 'em! Hold on a minute - I'll get my Grampa to tell you! He's told them stories to me, so he knows 'em better'n I do. Just - hold on.

(SALLY ANN pauses for a moment. Then, she reaches into her apron and raises her right hand: she is wearing a homemade hand puppet of an old man. He has big glass eyes and a set of false teeth: this is GRAMPA. SALLY ANN speaks for him in an old man's voice.)

GRAMPA

Is it morning? I been napping!

SALLY ANN

Grampa up and passed on three years ago but it's like he ain't gone at all!

PREACHER LUTEFISK

Lord, Sally Ann!

(SALLY ANN and GRAMPA perform *The Ballad of Paul Bunyan*.
Behind the scrim, shadow puppets behind them act out the tall tales they
sing.)

GRAMPA

*Born to a small-size Mam and Pappy
Paul grew big and strong and happy
They rocked him in a cradle when he got scrappy
A boat upon the ocean.*

PREACHER LUTEFISK

I'm busy, Sally Ann!

GRAMPA

*Never been an infant so gigantic
Big ol' baby in the cold Atlantic
Waves crashed on the shore when the boat rocked frantic
He set the seas in motion.*

OFFSTAGE VOICES

*Baby Paul Bunyan / Baby Paul Bunyan
Baby Paul Bunyan / The biggest baby yet!*

GRAMPA

That was out in ol' Massachusetts. Paul knocked so much mud onto the shore that he
made the town a' Boston.

PREACHER LUTEFISK

I know all these old stories. Old stories don't do nobody no good.

GRAMPA

Ain't yer Bible full of old stories?

PREACHER LUTEFISK

THAT'S DIFFERENT. Good day, sir. Time for Mornin' Prayer. Betty! Hurry now!
(Exits from one side as BETTY enters from the other, brushing her hair, checking
herself in a mirror. She's the Prettiest Girl in Town.)

SALLY ANN

That's Betty Lutefisk. She's my bestest friend. Hey, Betty.

BETTY

Hey, Ugly.

SALLY ANN

Whatcha doin'?

BETTY

Bein' pretty.

SALLY ANN

You do it so well!

BETTY

I know!

SALLY ANN

You know, Paul combs his beard with a whittled down tree? He's got to brush it regular because raccoons like to nest there and they git all tangled up. Sometimes -

BETTY

Sally Ann, I don't have time for those dumb old stories of yours

SALLY ANN

Oh, they ain't mine. They're Grampa's!

GRAMPA

*Little Big Paul set out for school
To larn readin' and writin' and the Golden Rule
'Fore the bell done rung he felt a big blame fool –
He'd knocked that schoolhouse over!*

*Bigger he grew and the damage got worse
His Popper said, "Son, your size is your curse!"
So his Momma sent him 'way with a dollar from her purse
Young Paul became a rover.*

OFFSTAGE VOICES

*Young Paul Bunyan / Young Paul Bunyan
Young Paul Bunyan / A trampin' cross the earth.*

BETTY

Listen, Stinky - what good are them old stories? I have other things to worry about - Reels are this Friday!

SALLY ANN

Don't I know it! I'm tryin' to grow tall.

BETTY

You'll never be tall, like me. You'll always be all runty. Pa, wait for me!
(Exits. SALLY ANN runs again.)

SALLY ANN

Reels are comin', Reels are really comin'. I sure do want Paul to dance with me. Shoot, someone's gotta teach me how I can grow!
(The ink-stained JOHNNY INKSLINGER enters running, carrying a mass of folders and files and papers.)
There's ol' Johnny Insklinger. He's Big Paul's secretary - invented bookkeeping hisself! He saves a gallon of ink every day just by not dotting his *i*'s or crossing his *t*'s. Johnny, how do I grow big as Paul?

INKSLINGER

Grow? Sally Ann, I'm busy, busy, busy! No time for silly chatter.

SALLY ANN

'Member how Paul was a baby and his folks used wagon wheels for diaper buttons? Or the time when -

INKSLINGER

Hey! I can't stop to hear no stories - it just ain't frugal! Frugality first and foremost!

SALLY ANN

Oh, I got millions on millions of Paul Bunyan stories.

INKSLINGER

And you've told me every one!

GRAMPA

Here's another!
*Caught in a blizzard of bright blue snow,
Paul heard a lowing and what do you know?
He saw an ox's horns sticking out of the snow:
That ox was snowbound in a canyon.*

GRAMPA (cont''d)

*Paul yanked that critter by the horns,
An Ox bright blue, as sure as you're born
A friend from whom he'd never be torn:
Babe became his boon companion.*

ALL

*Babe and Paul Bunyan / Babe and Paul Bunyan
Babe and Paul Bunyan / Friends forever more.*

INKSLINGER

Push off, Sally Ann: Business Calls!
(INKSLINGER races off. SALLY ANN keeps running.)

SALLY ANN

Everybody's too dang busy. Lookee here! It's Flapjack Hall, all gearin' up to feed our mighty lumberjacks today. There's Sourdough Sam, the old camp cook.
(SAM enters. He has one arm, one leg one ear and one eye and one lip.)
Don't stare.

SOURDOUGH SAM

What are YOU starin' at?

SALLY ANN

He lost one arm and one leg and one ear and one eye and one lip when a batcha batter blew up all over him - BLAM!

SOURDOUGH SAM

Sourdough doubles up mighty quick!

SALLY ANN

He don't cook no more.

SOURDOUGH SAM

Now I supervise the kitchen.

SALLY ANN

Maybe HE can tell me how to grow. Sourdough Sam, how do I grow big, like Paul?

SOURDOUGH SAM

You want to grow? You better eat what Paul eats.

SALLY ANN

What's that?

SOURDOUGH SAM

Each day, a dozen platters of fifty-foot flapjacks, thirteen seven-foot long strips of bacon, a passel of potatoes made into a twelve-foot stack of hash browns, and seven barrels of coffee.

SALLY ANN

I 'spect I'll be mighty full. Now I remember the time Paul was so hungry he wanted seconds and the rest of us had to go without for a week! Or the time -

SOURDOUGH SAM

Girl, I don't have time for no stories now. I gotta get those lazy Svenson boys a-movin' in the kitchen. HEY, SVENSONS- MOVE YER CUSHIONS! OLAF! SVEN! CLEM!

(The SVENSONS run past SALLY ANN, late for work. They all wear white chef's hats and carry enormous cooking paraphernalia.)

MOVE IT, YA EEJITS! THEM LUMBERJACKS ARE CALLIN' FER FLAPJACKS!

(The SVENSONS run off.)

Someday I'm a gonna kill 'em.

GRAMPA

But first, here's a story!

Tired of living the life of a tramp

Paul took a job in a lumber camp

In cutting races, was no other champ

Cut six trees in half an hour

Paul and Babe cleared North Dakota

Now he's settled down here in Minnesota

With a hundred trees his daily quota

A lumberjack of power

ALL (And Voices Offstage)

Ol' Paul Bunyan / Ol' Paul Bunyan

Ol' Paul Bunyan / The greatest Lumberjack

SOURDOUGH SAM

Sally Ann, you're being a botheration. Now, get a move on. I gotta get me some eggs and the chickens are backed up. COME ON, GIRLS: LAY! LAY! LAY!

(Clucking sounds. Women enter carrying gigantic eggs.)

SALLY ANN

But, Sourdough Sam -

SOURDOUGH SAM

Not now, Sally Ann! LAY! LAY! LAY! YO-DE-LAY-DE-LAY-DE-LAY-DE-HOO!

(SOURDOUGH SAM exits yodeling.)

SALLY ANN

Grampa, seems like nobody wants to hear them stories no more.

GRAMPA

It would seem so.

SALLY ANN

And they're all true.

GRAMPA

Every last one of 'em!

He lives! He breathes, he sleeps, he wakes!

We live for him, he gives and he takes.

His footsteps cause the town to quake

We shudder at his power!

May Big Paul live forever more -

Each year greater than the one before -

Our home and hearth keep watching o'er,

May his days ever flower!

Our Paul Bunyan / Our Paul Bunyan

Our Paul Bunyan / The greatest Lumberjack

(The shadows disappear. SALLY ANN is alone in a patch of wildflowers.)

SALLY ANN

Grampa? Grampa?

(GRAMPA snores. SALLY ANN puts him away in her apron.)

Aw, I guess I'm gonna be small size forever. And, worse, ain't nobody in town wants to hear my Paul Bunyan stories. And I've got millions on millions on millions of them! At least I think I do. I can't even count up to twelve. Want to see him? I bet you want to see him. Want a closer look? Come on!

(The backdrop changes. Lights change. Very grand, mysterious music. SCENE 3 follows immediately.)

SCENE 3: THE WAKIN' UP SONG

SCENE: The hilltop. SALLY ANN is alone onstage in the dawning morning. The silhouette of a giant sleeping man is projected onto the backdrop, above the trees: this is PAUL BUNYAN. He is bigger than anything seen thus far, the biggest thing ever.)

BUNYAN'S VOICE

NO TREES.

(Sleeps, snoring.)

SALLY ANN

Go ahead and gawk. It's okay. Everybody does. I could give tours! I could make me some money. I could make me a nickel. And then make me another! Them nickels add up. If I did give tours here's what I'd say:

(Lights change to fantasy circus sideshow lights. Tinkly music.)

Come old, come young, step lively, step lively! Starting from the feet, now stickin' out of his blanket: lookee here, Bunyan's bunyons! Bigger 'n onions! Siza mattresses, twice as hard! Move yer eyes up, old and young, Bunyan's legs. They're like two trees themselves, 'cept for the bristles of hair. Step lively, step lively! Walk from the legs to the belly, then. (We'll skip right over what's in-between: this here's a family show!) Old ones, young 'uns, Bunyan's belly! Like a big ol' hill you could roll down. See how it heaves? Oh, earthquake, earthquake! Just kidding. Step lively, step lively! Now, old ones, young 'uns, now we're at the head of the giant! His big ol' eyelids better stay closed or I'll be in big trouble. His beard there, a forest, each hair like one rope! And his head hair all tangled, though he combs it sometimes with a whittled down tree. Young ones, old ones, step lively, step lively! That's Bunyan's Body, the whole piece of him. Free.

(Bows stiffly. Lights back to normal. BUNYAN gives a great snore.)

When I look at him, I worry he don't notice me at all! I'm no bigger than a nit to him, but Paul's a great wonder of the world to me, still all and every day. O, I have a great - what's the word? Resp. Respon. Responsibility. I'm the one that wakes Paul up in the morning, every morning. It's my special, special job. Took it over from Grampa - he taught me everything I know!

(Pause. Then she takes out of her box a red knitted rooster's cap and puts it on her head.)

They call me Rooster Girl.

(She takes out a spoon and a pot. Turns upstage to address BUNYAN, making a terrible racket. Sings a raucous song.)

*Cock-a-doodle dingleberry,
Mornin' time and let's make merry!
Time to git up, time to git up! Ya Ya Ya!*

(BUNYAN groans.)

SALLY ANN (cont'd)

Cock-a-doodle fladdle flatin'
Mornin' time and lumber's waitin'!
Time to git up, time to git up! Ya Ya Ya!
(BUNYAN snores. To us:)

It ain't like him. He's usually up by now.
(To BUNYAN:)

Cock-a-doodle fladdle flooin',
Flapjacks frying, sky a-bluein' -
Wind a-blowin', bird's a-shooin' -
Dogs will do what dogs are doin'!
Time to git up, time to git up! Ya Ya Ya!
Ya Ya Ya!
YA YA YA!

(BUNYAN turns over and faces away. Smacks his lips and rustles down.)
I mean it Paul: there's trees to be cut. Lots and lots and lots of trees.

BUNYAN

(Turning over, facing SALLY ANN. Speaks, in a tired, destroyed voice.)
DREAMED THEY WAS GONE.

SALLY ANN

Naw, they're still there, Paul! Tons of trees. Just a-waiting for your axe!

BUNYAN

WHO'RE YOU?

SALLY ANN

It's me, Paul: Rooster Girl! You know me!

BUNYAN

(Sits up, rubs his head. After a pause:)
AW, STUMPS!

(His voice echoes. He spits off to the side, a big gob that lands with a thud. We hear the sound of a horse whinneying and galloping off. BUNYAN reaches for a huge ax, which we also see in silhouette. He stands. Each footfall shakes the earth. He stalks off. SALLY ANN strolls away. POPPER enters with his own ax. POPPER sharpens his ax through the following.)

SALLY ANN

(To us:) My Popper's the foreman of the lumberyard, in charge of all the axemen. Day's begun. Another job done! Another day begun! Ain't it gonna be a happy day?

POPPER

All depends. What did Paul say today?

SALLY ANN

He said “Stumps!” I think he noticed me some. Hey, Popper: why you and Mam cheer so when the moon come up gold last night?

POPPER

Aw... We cheered 'cuz the moon looked purty, that's all.

SALLY ANN

Uh-huh. Is that all?

POPPER

Mm-hmm.

SALLY ANN

Wanna hear a Paul Bunyan story?

POPPER

Tell you what, hunny: I'm don't have time to chat now. I'm gonna lumber off to the lumberyard. Get it? Gonna *lumber*...? Git it, *lumber*...? Tell me, did you know that was a joke?

SALLY ANN

(Happily oblivious:)

Naw!

POPPER

Be a good girl now. Get to your lessons with your Mam. And don't ask no more questions.

SALLY ANN

Oh, I won't. Bye Popper.

(POPPER exits.)

Questions? I'll ask me some questions. I had my toes crossed! I don't know many jokes but I do know when he's lying.

(Humming, she skips off. Scene 4 follows immediately, with no change of scene.)

SCENE 4: A JEREMIAD

(ODE SOYLE crawls out of another hole cut into the stage. He shushes us and then unpacks his sack: a load of old mismatched junk he's been collecting.)

ODE SOYLE

Ya find me scary? I'll tell you what's scary. Three nights he been moanin' "NO TREES." Just that: "NO TREES." Not speakin' much by day, neither. THAT'S scary.

(Pause. Almost pleasantly:)

So. Ya gotcher flannel. An yer flapjacks. An' yer chickens an' yer eggs. Gotcher boots and yer beets and yer feet and yer legs. An' OH yer gonna use 'em, specially those last two, pay attention, things movin' fast now, wagon train ain't waitin' for the slow or tar-brained, GIT UP ON THAT WAGON!

(Looks at the audience.)

Aw, it didn't move ya? Nobody listens to me. 'Swwhy I talk to myself. "Listen!" "What?"

"Listen!" "What?" Something BIG is dying. Or my name ain't Ode Soyl. PAH!

(He flings dirt toward the audience. Laughs crazily. Then scurries off.)

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