

# A LITTLE OVER- ACTING ON THE PRAIRIE

by Ken Bradbury



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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 female)

*Matilda, Betsy, Wheezy, and Nellie*

*Scene: a frontier cabin in the early 1800's. The acting style is suffocatingly melodramatic, over the top and into the woods.*

**MATILTA:** (*entering, melodramatically*) Oh, whoa! Oh, whoa! Is there no end to this endless winter? (*she freezes ... theatrically speaking*)

**BETSY:** (*entering, similarly overwrought and distraught*) Whatever shall become of this poor, helpless mother and her three overwrought children on the cruel, cruel prairie? (*she freezes*)

**WHEEZY:** (*entering as the others*) We shall starve! We shall starve! (*freezes*)

**NELLIE:** Or die from pneumonia, hysteria, nervous disorders, and over-acting!

**ALL:** We are ... Over-Acting on the Prairie!

**NELLIE:** Scene one!

**MATILTA:** A poor, desperate mother ... her husband lost in a blizzard somewhere near Butte, Montana ... left alone and adrift and in deep despair with her three starving children in their shabby, roofless cabin!

**BETSY:** She tries desperately to keep her children warm!

**WHEEZY:** Mommy, wouldn't we be warmer if we had a roof?

**MATILTA:** Oh, my children, we cannot afford a roof! Even the floor is borrowed from the neighbors! The walls are only painted on! We must suffer instead in silence and die in the snow!

**NELLIE:** Meanwhile, there are wolves at the door!

**WHEEZY:** Mama! Mama! There's a wolf at the door!

**MATILTA:** Does he have a roof? Tell him to go away! We have no time for visitors!

**WHEEZY:** But he's looking at me with hungry eyes, Mama!

**MATILTA:** Then we shall surely be devoured by wolves, our bodies strewn across the prairie, and our bones picked cleaned by the buzzards of the plains!

**NELLIE:** Is there another option?

**WHEEZY:** Mama! Mama! The wind is howling so fiercely! Our little cabin is blowing away!

**MATILTA:** Then we shall surely freeze to death ... our cold, lifeless bodies becoming statues on the landscape and our bones picked clean by the buzzards of the plains!

**NELLIE:** I think this would be a good time to go.

**BETSY:** Scene Two! The family takes off across the frozen plains! (*The girls form a tight little caravan, huddled close together and trudging against the wind, one painful step after another, the girls making wind noises when they are not speaking.*)

**WHEEZY:** Mama! Mama! I can't see! The snow is blinding me!

**MATILTA:** Do not worry, dear Wheezy, for there is nothing to look at! Trudge on! Trudge on!

**BETSY:** I can't trudge anymore, Mama. I think my trudger's broke.

**NELLIE:** And the ice is clinging to my nose! My fingers just fell off! My hair's a mess! Where is dear Daddy?

**MATILTA:** Your Daddy went outside to check on the cow and never returned.

**WHEEZY:** But we don't have a cow, Mama.

**MATILTA:** That's why he never returned. Trudge on, dear daughters! Trudge on!

**WHEEZY:** Look, Mama! A village! We are saved! We are saved!

**MATILTA:** We'll probably die before we get there!

**BETSY:** Scene Three! (*they immediately assume a "tied up" position*) Oh, Mama! We have stumbled into a band of outlaws, criminals, jerks, and several others displaying overt anti-social behavior! Oh, what shall we do?

**MATILTA:** Die!

**WHEEZY:** But Mama! I don't want to die! I have my whole miserable life ahead of me!

**NELLIE:** I had dreamed of going west, making my fortune! And starting my own line of kitchenware!

**BETSY:** And I dreamed to marry a rich young accountant and live in the suburbs with a time-share plan in Bermuda!

**MATILTA:** Too bad! These bad, bad men shall surely torture us, kill us, then leave our bodies strewn across the prairie, and our bones picked clean by the buzzards of the plains!

**WHEEZY:** Mama! I have chewed through my ropes! (*does a bit of kung-foo action*) Ahh! Ah-ha! Huh! Ho! I have completely beaten the bad, bad men! (*looking at her finger*) And I have broken my favorite fingernail! Oh, what shall I do?

**MATILTA:** Change the scene!

**BETSY:** Scene Four! The Bad Lands of North Dakota! The family struggles onward!

**MATILTA:** (*trudging with the others*) Struggle onward, daughters! When you walk through a storm keep your head up high! Just whistle a happy tune! Climb every mountain! The sun will come out tomorrow! And all that jazz!

**NELLIE:** Oh, Mama, I can go on no longer! We have walked for six years across the vast American prairie! We have grown into young women! We have braved everything the elements can throw against us!

**WHEEZY:** And you still won't let me date!

**MATILTA:** Let us stop here, my dear daughters! (*they stop*) I can go on no longer! I have led you through the wide Missouri while the eyes of Texas were upon us! I have brought you across Oklahoma where the wind comes sweeping down the plains! By the rivers gently flowing of Illinois! With Georgia on my mind! Doing the Tennessee Waltz while singing New York! New York! But it is now time that I simply lay down and die, my body strewn across the prairie, my bones picked clean ...

**BETSY:** Oh, Mama! You cannot die! You cannot die!

**MATILTA:** Why not?

**BETSY:** You've got a point. Go ahead. (*Matilda collapses and the daughters move on*)



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