

## **Prairie Adventures**

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### Cast List

(Human Creatures)

Noel—Child

Sam—Child

Grace—Child

Grandfather—Children's Grandpa

Grandmother—Children's Grandma

(Prairie Creatures)

Mel—Grasshopper

Murr—Grasshopper

Cupid—Prairie Chicken

Tym—Prairie Chicken

Uchu—Prairie Chicken

Anu—Prairie Chicken

Tae—Butterfly

Hesper—Butterfly

Bis—Bison

Son—Bison

Mep—Skunk

SETTING  
A North American Prairie.

**Scene One**

*(Spring. Early morning. Lights up on HUMAN CREATURES as they enter prairie. NOEL and SAM lead. GRANDMOTHER and GRANDFATHER follow, each holding one of GRACE'S hands.)*

SAM: This is literally the quietest place in the world.

GRACE: I hear all sorts of noises.

NOEL: I hear things, too. Sam just likes to complain.

SAM: I wasn't complaining. I actually like it. A LOT. No offense.

GRANDFATHER: It's very peaceful. This is where your mom and dad were married.

GRACE: Here? Out in the dead grass? Poor mommy and daddy.

SAM: Grace, this is just how prairie grasses look in the spring.

GRANDMOTHER: Wildflowers were blooming everywhere. Your mom even made a beautiful crown of some brightly colored ones.

NOEL: They've got pictures all over at the house. You two are so oblivious.

SAM: Oh yeah. You've seen the pictures, Grace. Dad had hair! Really weird hair. You like the purple dress Mom has on...

GRACE: I sort of remember.

NOEL: Dad said chickens used to do a crazy little dance here sometimes? Are they extinct now?

GRANDMOTHER: No. That's actually why we came out so early. The courtship ritual of the prairie chickens can be amazingly entertaining.

GRANDFATHER: We wanted to get front row seats. But we've all got to be very still and very quiet. Can we do that? Grace?

GRACE: Yes! But first I need to know, what's a courtship ritual? What does extinct mean? When will it--

*(GRANDMOTHER puts a shushing finger to her lips. ALL sit quietly. Lights fade.)*

## Scene Two

*(Spring. Early morning. Lights up on CUPID, TYM and UCHU as they walk around the prairie.)*

TYM: Where are we going, Cupid?

UCHU: Yeah, I'm tired and hungry.

CUPID *(Whispers)*: Just do as I do and do NOT whine. Strut like you own this lek.

UCHU: I don't know how to do all that.

TYM: No one owns the lek, Cupid. To pretend to do so is false.

CUPID: Stop running your beaks. Just set your neck and tail feathers at attention, snap your tails! Inflate the orange sacs on your necks and go BOOM!

TYM: What is the goal of such a spectacle?

UCHU: That sounds exhausting.

CUPID: Grr. Hideous miscreants, away from me! Eat or sleep or whatever. I tried. Go away. Kick dirt.

TYM: What does that mean?

CUPID: Kick dirt? It means get lost.

TYM: I don't want to get lost. I like to know precisely where I am at all times.

UCHU: I'm the same. I like to know where I am, when I can take a nap, what's for lunch, etcetera etcetera.

CUPID: Well, go know where you are somewhere else. I got no time for all this foolishness.

UCHU: I thought you were going to teach us how to impress the hens!

CUPID: THAT. IS. WHAT. I. HAVE. BEEN. TRYING. TO. DO. *(Stamps his foot.)*  
Since we got here!

TYM: You needn't yell, Cupid. And you should have been clear with us from the start.

UCHU: Yeah, Cupid. We can't read your mind.

TYM (*Whispers*): Thank goodness for that. I bet his brain is a very dark and messy place.

CUPID: My mind is deep and rich, brimming with dreams and wisdom. Add to the equation my phenomenal physical attributes (*inflates air sac, raises head feathers along his neck as he struts around TYM and UCHU*) and it is obvious why over ninety percent of the hens will once again choose me as a mate. (*Glances at hens sitting quietly nearby.*) Kaboom! (*Hens swoon.*) Do the math.

UCHU: I don't get it. Tym is way smarter than you and I'm much cuter than you. Look at yourself. You've got spooky weird orange feathers over your eyes!

TYM: I've actually done the math, Cupid. We can both be happy. (*Gazes at ANU.*) All I want is one hen by my side. Anu. She seems like a nice one who might want to watch the sun rise and set and share grasshopper dinners with me. Is that asking too much?

UCHU: Grasshoppers are soooo delicious. I'm soooooo hungry.

(*MEL and MURR hop in circles, hide behind blades of grass.*)

MEL and MURR: Eeks!

CUPID: (*Looks at the sky.*) I volunteer my time to help you foolish young whippersnappers learn a thing or two and you do nothing but complain and put me down. You think you can do better? Come on with it. (*Snaps tail. Makes crazy eyes.*) I can show you dark and messy! You'd best pack a lunch, because I can boom all day! Kaboom!

(*Hens swoon.*)

UCHU: I wish I'd packed a lunch.

CUPID: Kaboom!

(*Hens swoon.*)

UCHU: It must be rough living in your head, Cupid.

CUPID: You have no idea, Uchu. Kaboom!

(*Hens swoon.*)

TYM: Hmm. I just noticed that when he hollers Kaboom, all of the hens swoon. Why is that?

CUPID: Aha! (*Dances in a circle.*) The young rooster is catching on. Bravo! Never ever analyze the why of mating rituals. They are complicated riddles to which the hens hold

all the answers. Simply observe and imitate your mentor. Ready? (*Struts in front of hens. Raises feathers and inflates air sac.*) Kaboom!

(*Hens swoon.*)

TYM (*Whispers*): Do you think there's a chance that Anu would like to share a grasshopper and watch the sun set with me?

UCHU: This is all crazy stupid. I need to eat! (*Looks around.*) Yippee, three grasshoppers! (*MEL and MURR run.*) Got one! (*Crunches into grasshopper.*) Nom nom nom nom! Yum! Still hungry. Where did the other two go?

(*MEL and MURR run in circles, hide behind blades of grass.*)

MEL and MURR: Eeks!

CUPID: Are you two chicken littles ready to get serious about this? If not, I'll get busy with my own romances. Lots of beautiful hens out there. Kaboom!

(*Hens swoon.*)

UCHU: Where? All I see is you two. And neither one of you is beautiful.

CUPID: Uchu, would you notice if an enormous bison cow walked by and bit your tail?

UCHU: What's a bison? If I can eat it or take a nap on it, I would notice it!  
(*BIS approaches quietly, bites UCHU'S tail. UCHU jumps.*)

UCHU: Merciful heavens above, help me! Cupid, get that bad animal before it tears me to shreds!

(*BIS follows UCHU as he runs around CUPID*)

CUPID: She'll swallow you whole. Go faster!

UCHU: I give up. (*Collapses on the ground, breathes heavily.*) Please, just make it quick. Cupid, give my regards to all the hens who will miss out on my cuteness.

TYM: Uchu, Bison are herbivorous.

UCHU: Huh?

BIS: My teeth are specially designed to grind plants. Mainly grasses. You're safe.

UCHU: Then why did you chomp on my tail? And why did Cupid say you would swallow me whole?

BIS: We were just having a bit of fun with you.

UCHU: Getting chased by a gigantic beast is not my idea of fun. You're even scarier than Cupid.

CUPID: Uchu, show respect. Bis is a magnificent bison cow. Bison are the largest land mammals on the entire continent, yet, lucky for all of us, Bis is extraordinarily gentle.

UCHU: Gentle? Ha! You've never had her try to chew your tail off!

BIS: Thank you for the compliments, Cupid.

*(BIS regurgitates food, chews, swallows.)*

UCHU: And magnificent? Right. Umm, am I the only one who just saw her puke, then eat it? Nasty!

TYM: Bison can do that. They truly are remarkable creatures, Uchu. Are you envious?

UCHU: Yeah, like I really want to eat the same food twice. Gross. *(Pause.)* Hey. Heeeey, maybe it wouldn't be so bad. Is it like a little dessert? How does it taste?

BIS: Pretty bland both times, actually. I consume about 35 pounds of grasses and forbes every day.

TYM: That's awesome. No wonder you're so big and slow.

CUPID: She can easily outrun any of us, any day of the week, even when she's gravid. Are you currently with calf?

BIS: Indeed I am. On the way to a nice, grassy knoll for the birthing. Just wanted to observe your display en route. But you're dilly dallying this year. I've got to keep on. Bye!

CUPID: Please stay, Bis. We're just about to get started.

*(BIS glances around. Nods.)*

BIS: For you, Cupid. Proceed.

CUPID: Thank you, Bis. *(Jumps in the air.)* Kaboom! *(Hens swoon.)* Uchu, give it a go!

UCHU: Um. Boom. *(Hens twitter. UCHU finally notices them.)* Oh, the hens! Hey, I get it now. Heeeey. Boom boom kaboom! *(Snaps tail and winks. Hens swoon. UCHU dances in a circle and jumps in the air.)* Kaboom!

*(Hens swoon.)*

CUPID: There comes a time in every chicken's life when he stands up and becomes a rooster. Uchu, I believe we all just witnessed your transition! Tym, are you ready?

TYM: Yes. I would just like to state that I have had my eyes on one particularly elegant hen for a long time. I think you know who you are. Anu?

ANU: Me?

TYM: Yes. It would be my honor to share many grasshopper dinners and sunrises with you. *(Bows. Cackles. Jumps in air. Snaps tail and inflates air sac.)* Kaboom! Grasshoppers, sunrises and, er, I forgot to mention sunsets. *(Bows.)* If you're interested. *(Pause.)* Anu, are you interested?

ANU: I am.

*(ANU and TYM dance together, then exit. Lights fade.)*

### **Scene Three**

*(Summer. Late morning. Lights up on HUMAN CREATURES as they sit amongst grasses and wildflowers.)*

SAM: Question. How could Uchu not notice the hens for so long? I notice girls all the time.

NOEL: Cupid was girl crazy like you. Uchu was totally self absorbed. *(Pause.)* Like me.

GRACE: I thought they were all funny. Kaboom!

GRANDFATHER: I reckon I am like Tym. Eyes for only your grandma. *(GRANDMOTHER kisses GRANDFATHER on his cheek.)* The hens sort of blend in with the prairie foliage. It helps keep them safe from predators, especially when they are protecting their young.

SAM: Why did Noel think the prairie chickens were extinct?

GRANDMOTHER: Many prairie creatures are in danger of disappearing forever.

GRACE: Why? Does the bison eat all of the other animals? She seemed nice, but I'd still be very scared if I met her. Um, because I weigh thirty-five pounds, so she'd just need to eat one Grace meal and be good for the day.

NOEL: Grace, humans are using the creature's habitat to make more room for our own houses and businesses. And prairie soils are very fertile, so farmers plant crops in them. People don't think about all the prairie creatures that lose their homes.

GRACE: Wow. You know a lot.

NOEL: I like prairies. And we learned about ecosystems in school this year.

SAM: Bison are herbivores. That means they only eat vegetables. Weren't you paying attention when the creatures were talking?

GRACE: Mostly I was, but I kept hoping to see a butterfly! Do you think that big bison ate all the butterflies, because they look like flowers?

NOEL: Most butterflies are not butterflies yet, they're still eggs, larvae or pupae. Bis might accidentally eat them, if they're attached to the grasses she eats. Right, Grandma?

GRANDMOTHER: Why don't we look around for them?

*(HUMAN CREATURES stand. GRACE skips around.)*

GRACE: Good idea! Are they orange and blue?

GRANDMOTHER: They will usually resemble the plant their mothers laid them on. Like the prairie chicken hens, they often blend in with their surroundings.

GRACE: To keep them safe?

*(GRANDFATHER pats GRACE on her head.)*

GRANDFATHER: Exactly!

*(GRANDMOTHER kneels, reaches into her pocket, hands a magnifying lens to GRACE. GRACE kneels and peers through the lens.)*

GRACE: Oh my goodness! It's like a magical little world on every flower and piece of grass! Sam and Noel, come look. Hurry!

*(SAM and NOEL join GRACE on their knees. Lights fade.)*

#### **Scene Four**

*(Summer. Late morning. Lights up on grasses and flowers. Pause. An egg hatches. TAE crawls out, noisily eats her eggshell and nearby foliage. Lights fade. Lights up on TAE eating foliage. HESPER breaks out of her cocoon and stretches her wings.)*



TAE (*Talks as she eats*): My name is Tae. Am I being rude? Are you hungry? (*Pause.*) Hello? Aren't you hungry?

HESPER: I'm Hesper. I need to focus all of my energy on pumping fluids to my wings.

TAE: Don't you get hungry? I'm so hungry I could eat all day!

HESPER: When I was a wee larva, I ate incessantly. Now I am an adult and I need to focus on important things.

TAE: Isn't eating important?

HESPER: When you are a butterfly larva, yes. When you are an adult butterfly, not so much.

TAE: I eat all the time. Did you notice that I'm getting fat?

HESPER: No.

TAE: Really? You must not be very observant. I'm getting so fat that it hurts. Nobody will pick me as a friend. I'll spend my whole life like this.

HESPER: Tsk tsk. Where do you get your misinformation?

TAE: As I eat, I observe the world. Only beautiful creatures like you get chosen.

HESPER: Every creature in the prairie is beautiful and important.

TAE: You're just saying that so I quit talking to you. You don't really mean it. Do you really mean it?

HESPER: I always mean what I say.

TAE: OMG. (*Stops eating.*) I'm going to explode. Why didn't you stop me from eating that whole blade of grass? Am I going to explode?

HESPER: You are going to molt.

(*TAE begins to shed her skin.*)

TAE: OMG. This is weird. It hurts!

HESPER: It will pass.

(*TAE emerges from her old skin.*)

TAE: I feel like a new caterpillar!

HESPER: In a way, you are.

TAE: But I'm crazy hungry again, same as I was. What should I do?

HESPER: Eat.

TAE: But then I'll get all fat again!

HESPER: Tae, all butterfly caterpillars eat a lot. This is your time to eat, grow, shed your skin, eat a bunch more, shed your skin again...

TAE: When will I get my wings?

HESPER: You will molt a few more times, then you will spin a cocoon and pupate. When you emerge from the cocoon, you will be an adult with wings. (*Flutters her wings slightly.*) Like me.

TAE: You didn't answer my question. How long will that take?

HESPER: I can't give you a specific number of days. It varies from butterfly to butterfly.

TAE: Gah! Can't you answer a simple question with a simple answer?

HESPER: I can if the answer actually is simple. Butterfly development is complex. It depends on--

TAE: Hesper, enough with the smarty pants lectures. (*Eats noisily.*) Gah. Hey, am I annoying you yet?

HESPER: Don't worry about it. I remember being a larva. It's a wonderful yet confusing time.

TAE: Just answer my question. Yes or no, am I annoying you?

HESPER: Yes.

TAE: I knew it. (*Pause.*) I meet a friend and right away she doesn't like me. Why did I even try? You really hurt my feelings. (*Pause. Sniffles, resumes eating.*) Aren't you going to apologize?

HESPER: No.

TAE: Are you totally cold-blooded?

HESPER: Yes. All insects are.

TAE: Not me. I'm hot-blooded.

HESPER: No.

TAE: Yes. I really am! But I like the sunshine.

*(MEL and MURR hop past.)*

MEL and MURR: Wee!

TAE: Gah! None of the other creatures even notice me.

HESPER: That's a good thing. Larvae are helpless and fragile.

TAE: I'm the most helpless creature ever. Did you see that my eyes aren't really eyes? They're actually tiny, precious flowers.

HESPER: No. Listen, I'm trying to help you. Shall I stop?

TAE: Help? I can take it or leave it. I'm not saying that to hurt your feelings.

HESPER: My feelings are fine.

TAE: I thought you were annoyed?

HESPER: Tae, butterflies have very short lives. I'd rather not waste my time with this sort of crazy conversation.

TAE: Now I'm annoying and a crazy waste of time? Ouch.

HESPER: Whatever.

TAE: Whatever? I hate it when creatures say that.

HESPER: So do I.

TAE: Then why did you say it? Especially to a fragile and helpless caterpillar, just trying to learn about the world?

HESPER: Tae, my wings are almost ready for flight.

TAE: I bet you can't wait to get away from me.