

THE TAMING of Judge Roy Bean

By Pat Cook

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DEDICATION

This play is dedicated to Larry and Sylvia Ford for the years of friendship, good food and cigars.

The playwright, Pat Cook

STORY OF THE PLAY

West Texas in the late 1800s was wild, lawless, and rife with robbers. And that just suited Judge Roy Bean right down to his socks. "Well, when I came here the place was overrun with robbers, cutthroats and thieves," he intones. "So we hung the politicians and ever'thing seemed to even out."

Well, things get pretty boring after a while and after the Judge reads a dime novel about Buffalo Bill he figures his story should be told as well. And fortunately for him, the boys have just found a reporter they want to hang. Freed from the gallows, Butler Boone agrees to write Bean's bio ... but at what price? Civilization is about to descend on the little town of Langtry in the form of school marms, pushy mothers, conniving matchmakers and an occasional gun-slinger, just to stir up the dust.

Farcical situations and wisecracks fly as fast as ricocheting bullets in this hilarious spoof of Western justice. "Yep," says the Judge, "this will put the fun back in funeral." One easy set.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7 M, 7 W)

JUDGE ROY BEAN: A feisty grizzled man, mid-50s, ready to live up to his legend.

CLEM: The Judge's loyal but slightly sarcastic deputy.

HANK: The hot-headed leader of the cowboy trio who hangs around the Judge.

PETE: The second of the trio, always up for a good time.

RALF: The third of the trio but not as bright as the others.

BUTLER: A smart reporter who's something of a con-man.

LISA: Lovely and delicate, the ultimate "school marm."

PENELOPE: Lisa's dowager of a mother, she's a bit pushy.

GILDA: A liberated woman, she's also something of a shady character.

JENNY: One of a trio of brides brought in for the boys, she's sort of brash.

CLOE: The second bride, a female version of Pete.

DAFNE: The third bride, a bit light in the head.

PLYMIE: A lovely young lady with a secret.

***RED:** A gun slinger who's out to get the Judge in a gunfight.

***LITTLE:** The little brother of Red.

***FLINT:** A stranger looking for trouble.

***NOTE:** *RED, LITTLE and FLINT are to be played by the same actor.*

Time: The late 1800s.

Place: The saloon/courtroom belonging to Judge Roy Bean out in the wild and woolly West.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: Judge Roy Bean's Courtroom/Saloon.

Scene 2: Later that afternoon.

Scene 3: Two weeks later.

ACT II

Scene 1: Later that day.

Scene 2: Two weeks later.

SETTING

The setting for this yarn is the legendary courtroom/saloon belonging to Judge Roy Bean, the only law west of the Pecos. The room itself is very rustic. Its walls are made of the roughest planks decorated here and there with wanted posters, lanterns, coffee pots, hats, cow skulls, horns and bullet holes.

There are two entrances in the floor plan. The first (USC) consists of swinging doors that lead outside, and the second (SL) which has an actual door, leads to the Judge's sleeping quarters.

The furniture in the room is dominated by a large bar behind which the Judge holds court and tends bar. It is a dog leg and occupies the USR corner of the room. Behind the bar are various shelves of bottles flanking a large picture of Lillie Langtry, the Judge's true love. The rest of the furniture consists of saloon tables and chairs scattered around the room.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: JUDGE and CLEM are seated at a DSL table and looking down at a chess set. The Judge almost stands as if about to make a move and then changes his mind. After a slight pause, he raises an arm, picks up a piece but changes his mind and replaces the piece. After a longer pause, Clem finally gets up the guts to speak.)

CLEM: You sure you don't know how to play this game, Judge?

JUDGE: Not a clue. You either?

CLEM: No, sir. Funny somebody just comin' in and leavin' it here like this.

JUDGE: Ain't it? *(HE rises and moves over to the bar.)* But what's to stop 'em, huh? I mean, things is sure dead around here lately.

CLEM: *(Following HIM over.)* Yes, sir, most of them got that way on account'a you hanging 'em.

JUDGE: *(Picks up a bottle.)* That's the law. I am the law, the only law west of the Pecos. I hang men who deserve to hang because they broke the law ... or was caught cheatin' at cards... or said something bad about the Alamo ... or had a lot of coin janglin' in their pockets when they walked ... or woke me up in the middle of the night.

CLEM: Well, power corrupts.

JUDGE: What's that mean?

CLEM: I don't know. The last feller we hung said that just before we yanked his horse. Why'd we hang him agin?

JUDGE: He was a lawyer.

CLEM: Oh, yeah. I'm surprised he stayed alive till the hangin'. *(The JUDGE pours CLEM a drink and one for himself.)*

JUDGE: You know what this place was like before I got here?

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CLEM: You have explained that to me a multitude of times, yes.

JUDGE: *(Menacingly.)* You want to hear it agin, though, don'cha?

CLEM: *(Fearful.)* Oh, yeah! O' course! I hang on your every word and that's just a phrase.

JUDGE: *(Remembering.)* Before I came here, this place was overrun with bandits, cutthroats, brigands and politicians.

CLEM: Wha'd you do?

JUDGE: Well ... first, we hung the politicians and then ever'thing just sorta evened out.

CLEM: I can see that.

JUDGE: But one thing I have taken notice of of late. *(Curiously.)* We don't have a lot of new families moving here.

CLEM: *(Nods.)* Property values have decreased due to the high interest rates and lack of civic improvements. *(The JUDGE glares at HIM.)* That's what that real estate guy said just before we hung him.

JUDGE: I swear, Clem, you get most of your conversation at the hangin' tree.

CLEM: Well, no offense, Judge, and I mean that. I never intend no offense to you in any way, shape or form. Trust me on this one, I watch ever'thing I ever say to you and if I EVER offend you, you just tell me and I'll shoot myself and avoid the suspense.

JUDGE: But?

CLEM: But ... well, Judge, you get most of your discussion fodder either from who just got hung, who's been hung and who's GONNA get hung ... and Miss Lillie. *(Holds his glass toward the picture behind the bar in a silent toast.)*

JUDGE: Ah yes. *(HE moves behind the bar.)* Miss Lillie Langtry, the Jersey Lillie. The toast of the American stage. She has won my undying and unrelentin' love. I shall forever worship her from afar.

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JUDGE: *(Cont'd.)* I just thank Providence that I can read about her from time to time in those newspapers you bring in from the train. If it weren't for those papers carryin' her image and glorious words ... *(HE gets an inspiration.)* That's it! That's what we need!

CLEM: A woman? That ain't news, Judge. Some of the boys been lookin' at ME pretty funny.

JUDGE: No, you nimrod! We need somebody to tell about us. About me and my exploits! Hey, looky here. *(HE pulls up a dime novel from behind the bar.)* Look at this here story about Buffalo Bill and HIS adventures.

(Suddenly, through the swinging doors, HANK, PETE and RALF shove their way in, pulling BUTLER with them. Butler's hands are tied and Hank is carrying a rope.)

HANK: Got us another one, Judge. Ripe for a hanging.

BUTLER: I protest!

PETE: Come on, Judge, we done got a rope and ever'thing.

JUDGE: Can't you boys do nothin' on your own? I'm talkin' business here. *(Back to CLEM.)* This thing goes on and on about him winning the West almost single-handedly ...

BUTLER: Judge? Judge Roy Bean?

RALF: Look, why do we have to trudge all the way out to that tree? I mean, it's muddy and I got on my Sunday-go-to-meetin' boots.

HANK: We'll hang him here. *(HE throws a rope over a beam and pulls up the noose, placing it around BUTLER'S neck.)*

CLEM: Yeah, but Judge, all that stuff is mostly fabrications. And what weren't fabrications, they just made up.

BUTLER: *(To JUDGE.)* Excuse me?

JUDGE: That ain't the point, Clem. It don't matter if it holds sand or not, the thing is he gets his name spread all over this part of the country.

BUTLER: *(As the noose is fitted.)* I hate to bother you.

End of Freeview

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