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Family Plays

WEST OF PECOS



COMEDY BY
TIM KELLY

WEST OF PECOS

“There were lots of interesting and fun-to-create character roles.” —Valerie McMahan, Okemah High School, Okemah, Okla.

Comedy. By Tim Kelly. *Cast: 8m., 12w., extras if desired.* Judge Roy Bean, “The Law West of Pecos,” has decreed Orin Powers must hang for shooting up a poster of his beloved Lily Langtry, the famed frontier actress. The sentence has the town of Langtry, Texas, in a stew. Bad men want Orin to swing. Good citizens want him to live. Only one thing will save the unfortunate lad from the gallows—the appearance of Lily herself. What happens when the dazzling and glamorous “toast of two continents” meets the grizzled old “Bean” constitutes the fun, romance and drama that make up the legend. *One int. set. Approximate running time: 85 minutes. Code: W17.*

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(WEST OF PECOS)

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WEST OF PECOS
A Comedy in Three Acts
For Eight Men, Twelve Women,
Extras if desired

CHARACTERS
(in order of appearance)

ORIN	<i>a young cowboy</i>
ZERALDA	<i>his sweetheart</i>
MRS. POWERS	<i>Orin's mother</i>
MRS. OATES	<i>Zeralda's mother</i>
MRS. HAYES	<i>a neighbor</i>
SNOW FEATHER	<i>an Indian maiden</i>
RANGER	<i>the Judge's deputy</i>
MONTANA	<i>a young female journalist</i>
JOHNNY-BEHIND-THE-ACE	<i>a young bad man</i>
SPURS	<i>another bad man</i>
1ST WOMAN PASSENGER	<i>a hungry traveler</i>
2ND WOMAN PASSENGER	<i>another hungry traveler</i>
SOCRATES FOGG	<i>a lawyer</i>
MRS. FOGG	<i>his wife</i>
JUDGE ROY BEAN	<i>a domineering frontier justice</i>
CAYO CLAIBORNE	<i>Roy's adopted son</i>
LILY LANGTRY	<i>the famed English actress</i>
ACTRESS	<i>a young member of the acting troupe</i>
PEWTREE	<i>villain of the acting troupe</i>
EXTRAS	<i>bad men, citizens train passengers, etc.</i>

PLACE: *Langtry, Texas*
TIME: *A hot summer day, 1885*

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play takes place in The Jersey Lilly, a gathering place for the populace of Langtry, Texas.

ACT ONE: A hot summer day, 1885.

ACT TWO: The same. One hour later.

ACT THREE: The same. Following immediately.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS:

It is important to keep the blocking neat. In any play with a large cast there is a tendency to bunch up. The director must take extra care to see that each performer is fully visible from the audience. Also, since many characters are on stage at the same time, it is vital that each performer keep in the scene, reacting to what is being said and done according to his or her personality.

If possible, an overture adds considerably toward establishing a mood. A banjo solo is a guaranteed audience pleaser. Suggested tunes are: "*Buffalo Gal Won't You Come Out Tonight*," "*Sweet Betsy from Pike*," "*Rio Grande*," "*The Old Chisholm Trail*," etc.

A drop curtain in lieu of a standard pull curtain offers a possibility if the stage is so constructed. The drop curtain should advertise patent medicines, dental services, magazines, general stores, etc.

For a curtain call a formal pose might prove effective. Have various characters posed as if they were stationed for an 1885 photographer, that is, stiff and formal. For example, the Judge seated, derby in hand, with Lily on one side, Cayo on the other. Or, station entire cast as if it were advertising a scene from Buffalo Bill's "Wild West Show."

HISTORICAL NOTE:

Judge Roy Bean died on March 16, 1903, eight months before Lily Langtry was scheduled to arrive in his dusty kingdom. Lily lived until 1929, the year of America's Wall Street crash.

PRODUCTION NOTES

COSTUME NOTE:

The period is anywhere from 1880 to the turn of the century. The general costuming is obvious. Listed here are only the unusual outfits or those items that are essential to the plot.

SNOW FEATHER: Indian dress, headband, moccasins.

SOCRATES: Flashy stickpin in tie.

ROY: Act I: Derby hat. Act II: Bandana.

LILY: Act I: A handsome, theatrical full-length gown, gloves, picture hat. Act II: For melodrama, a simple white dress. Act III: Same gown as Act I.

ACTRESS in melodrama: Grandmother dress.

LOUISE: Starched white apron.

PEWTEE: Villain's outfit: top hat, frock coat, fake drooping moustache, buggy whip.

PROPERTIES:

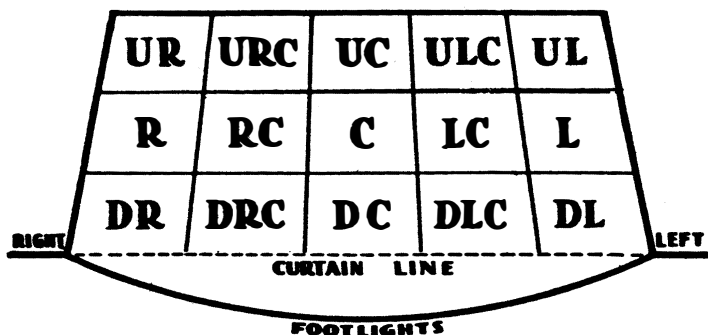
GENERAL: Two benches, shelves with groceries, sign reading "The Jersey Lilly," "Dining Room" sign, counter, law books, gavel, sign reading "Pickles 1¢" on one side and "Court in session" on the other side, tray, glasses, bottles of sarsaparilla, water, scrapbooks with photos, two tables with three chairs each, two theatrical posters, additional stage dressing as desired: cracker barrels, cuspidors, hides, hanging lamps, etc. For Act II: rocking chair or stool.

PEWTREE: Buggy whip.
SOCRATES: Handkerchief.
RANGER: Pistol and holster.
JOHNNY: Pistols and holsters, money.
SPURS: Pistol and holster, money.
ROY: Pistol and holster, money.
MONTANA: Pocketbook, notebook, pencil.
WOMEN PASSENGERS: Handkerchiefs.
MRS. OATES, MRS. POWERS, MRS.
HAYES: Handkerchiefs.
LOUISE: Box of props containing paper
snow and cups.
CAYO: Deck of cards.
SNOW FEATHER: Box containing wedding
dress, veil, paper flowers.

SOUND EFFECTS

Offstage gun shots, optional train whistle from off L, crowd noise from off L during Lily's arrival, the race, etc. Crowd noise is easily created orally by the actors themselves or by the stage crew.

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: UR for *up right*, RC for *right center*, DLC for *down left center*, etc. A territory designated on the stage refers to a general area, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

ACT ONE

SCENE: "The Jersey Lilly," once a saloon, now a general store, restaurant and waiting room for the Southern Pacific Railroad. It is also the courtroom of Judge Roy Bean, "the law West of Pecos." It is rustic, western and none too clean. DR a doorway leads into a corridor with the unseen dining room beyond. A "Dining Room" sign is above the doorway. Against the wall, R; there is a bench. Along the back wall from URC to ULC are shelves stacked with food staples, tinned goods, bolts of cloth, oil lamps, etc. Over the shelves, in bold lettering, we read: "The Jersey Lilly" (with two "l's" because the Judge is a terrible speller). In front of the shelves, downstage somewhat, is the bar which now serves as a grocery counter. Several law books are atop the counter, and a large sign reading: "Pickles 1¢." Entrance from the outside street is L. There are two round tables, one DRC one DLC. Each table has three armless chairs, one to the left of each table, one to the right, and one directly behind facing out to the audience. Advertising some plays of the period there are two

large theatrical posters on the back wall, one UR and one UL. They feature an actress. The name Lily Langtry is prominent on each poster. Another bench is DL. Whatever else can be added to give the place character and atmosphere is welcomed and can be added at the director's discretion: mounted heads, cracker barrels, "wanted" posters, cuspidors, hides tacked to the walls, hanging lamps, price lists for groceries, vegetable bins, Indian rugs, beaded curtains on the doorway DR, batwing doors for the entrance, L, etc. The setting is easily adapted to drapes or flats.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: ORIN POWERS, a young cowboy of about seventeen, is seated on chair left of DRC table. He looks very depressed. His sweetheart, ZERALDA, a charming young thing of sixteen or so, is kneeling on the floor beside him, crying. Her head rests against Orin's leg. Orin's mother, MRS. POWERS, is looking out into the street from doorway L. She, too, is upset and nervously twists a handkerchief in her hands.

MRS. POWERS. Where is he? Why doesn't he get here?

ORIN. I ain't in no hurry to see him.

MRS. POWERS. I don't mean the Judge. I mean Mr. Fogg. (Wearily.) Wishin' isn't goin' to get the train here any faster, is it?

(ZERALDA weeps all the louder).

ORIN. Hush, Zeralda. All them tears ain't gonna

help none.

ZERALDA. But he's gonna hang you, Orin.
(Points off L.) He's gonna have them
take you out there and put a rope around
your neck and--(She breaks off, sobbing.)

MRS. POWERS (crossing to ZERALDA). Now stop
that, child. Orin's right. Tears won't
help one iota. (Helps her up.) Sit down.
You're plumb wore out. (MRS. POWERS
guides ZERALDA to chair behind the
table. She sits, drying her tears.)

MRS. OATES (from off L). Zeralda, you in there?

MRS. POWERS. Who can that be?

ZERALDA. It's Momma.

(Zeralda's mother, MRS. OATES, enters L,
crosses DC. With her is a neighbor, MRS.
HAYES. She crosses to in front of table
DLC.)

MRS. OATES. Lordamercy, what's been happenin'?

MRS. HAYES. Gone a few days visitin' poor ailin'
Miz Willoughby and all we hear comin' back
is folks sayin' the Judge is fixin' to hang
Orin.

ORIN. Miz Hayes, I stand a purty good chance of
dancin' where there ain't no floor.

MRS. HAYES. For what?

ORIN. Two days ago all I done wuz shoot Wildman
Jack in the hip.

MRS. OATES. That outlaw! You should've aimed
for his head.

MRS. HAYES. You deserve a medal. What you
shoot him for?

ORIN. He stole my hoss.

MRS. HAYES. Shootin' a hoss thief ain't no hangin'

offense. Not even in Langtry.

ORIN. But he wuz in Johnny-Behind-The-Ace's gang. Johnny's fit to be tied.

MRS. OATES. Johnny-Behind-The-Ace is a scandal to decent society. He should be on trial, not you.

MRS. HAYES. Absolutely.

MRS. POWERS. Guess you ladies forgot what day this is.

MRS. HAYES. It's Thursday.

MRS. OATES. What if it is?

ZERALDA (making an announcement). Two days ago wuz Lily Langtry Day. (MRS. HAYES and MRS. OATES both give a tiny scream and cover their mouths in horror.)

MRS. POWERS (walking to theatrical poster UR). You know the Judge's rule. No shootin' on Lily Langtry day.

ORIN. Or else.

MRS. HAYES (sitting behind DLC table). Shockin'. Lily Langtry! I'm so sick of hearin' that name.

MRS. OATES. A grown man like Judge Bean in love with an actress he's never seen. Theatrical posters of her all over the town.

ORIN. He worships her, Miz Oates.

MRS. OATES. And dogs bay at the moon. What does that prove 'ceptin' they're moonstruck.

ORIN. 'Sides I shot up some of them posters when I wuz chasin' Wildman Jack.

ZERALDA. Orin shattered Miz Langtry's kneecaps somethin' awful.

MRS. OATES (to MRS. POWERS). What are you goin' to do?

MRS. POWERS (gesturing to poster). Roy Bean ain't hangin' my boy, Lily Langtry Day or

no Lily Langtry Day. (Walks to MRS. OATES.) I wired for Mr. Fogg, the lawyer in Vinegar Gulch. He'll be here on the noon train.

MRS. HAYES. Good thinkin'.

MRS. POWERS. Zeralda, honey, you get down to the platform and make sure the Judge don't send Mr. Fogg packin'.

ZERALDA. Yes, ma'am. (She goes out L.)

MRS. HAYES. You certain Mr. Fogg will come?

MRS. POWERS. All I can do is pray.

MRS. OATES. I think a refreshin' sarsaparilla (Pronounced "sas-parilly.") would do us all good.

MRS. HAYES. I doubt if you get anythin' refreshin' in this place.

MRS. OATES. My throat's as dry as a crik in August. (Calls off R.) Snow Feather! (MRS. OATES sits right of DLC table.)

ORIN. All ain't lost.

MRS. HAYES. You speakin' of Mr. Fogg's arrival?

ORIN. No. Cayo Claiborne's gone to San Antonio (Pronounced "San Antone.") and he's gonna fetch back Miz Langtry herself.

MRS. OATES. You believe that?

ORIN. She's gonna plead for me, Cayo says.

MRS. POWERS. Don't talk simple. Ev'rybody knows Cayo is a notorious liar. He got out of town because Johnny-Behind-The-Ace was gunnin' for him.

MRS. OATES. Where is that girl? (Calls off R.) Snow Feather!

ORIN (to the defense). I believe him. If Cayo says that's what he wuz gonna do, he's gonna do it.

MRS. POWERS. Put your faith in Mr. Fogg, not

the likes of Cayo Claiborne.

(SNOW FEATHER, an Indian maiden of fifteen, enters from DR. She is dressed in a beaded gown, headband, moccasins. She is bright and alert.)

ALL (except ORIN). Sarsaparilla. (SNOW FEATHER makes a face as if the word sounded bad in her ear, goes behind counter and pours glasses from some keg or bottle. From off L comes sound of train pulling in. All react.)

MRS. POWERS. Mr. Fogg has jus' got to be on that train.

ORIN. Ain't nothin' can help me, I guess. Time's runnin' out. (To MRS. OATES.) Guess your Zeralda is gonna be a widow before I even git to marry her.

MRS. OATES. You poor unfortunate boy.

MRS. HAYES. I'm gonna write a letter to the governor!

MRS. POWERS. If anyone hangs it should be Lily Langtry. If she only knew what she's done to this town, to the Judge, to my son . . . (MRS. POWERS sits behind table DRC, takes Orin's hand. SNOW FEATHER carries down a tray on which are five glasses of sarsaparilla. She serves one to ORIN, one to MRS. POWERS, crosses and serves MRS. OATES and MRS. HAYES.)

MRS. OATES (tasting sarsaparilla). A tonic for the nerves.

MRS. POWERS. Zeralda's gone to meet the train. You have her glass, Snow Feather. (SNOW FEATHER shrugs, downs the tonic, and, then, makes a frightful face as if she had

just been poisoned. She slams down the tray, runs out DR, gasping loudly. The women stare after her in amazement.)

MRS. HAYES. What on earth---

ORIN. Snow Feather can't stand sarsaparilla.
Never could.

(RANGER, the Judge's deputy, enters L. He is devoted to the Judge and will do anything the magistrate orders.)

RANGER. What's wrong with Snow Feather? (Looks off L.) Ran right by me. Didn't even speak. Never seed her act like that before. She wuz downright impolite.

MRS. POWERS (rising, angry). Impolite! A hangin', I suppose, is your idea of courtesy.

RANGER (walking behind the counter). Ain't got time to jaw, Miz Powers. Gotta git the Judge's books ready for court.

MRS. POWERS (contemptuously). Court! (Looks around.) You call this--grocery--this excuse for a restaurant--this waitin' room--a court?

RANGER. Judge Bean sez wherever he is that's where the law be west of the Pecos River.

MRS. HAYES. There's no need to remind us.

MRS. OATES (huffily). The Judge's books! I don't believe the man can even read. Or spell. (Points to sign above the shelves.) Ev'ryone knows there's only one "I" in Lily.

RANGER. You aimin' to tell the Judge he don't know how to spell?

MRS. OATES. It's not that he's fond of readin', only that he likes to have people believe he is.

RANGER. Judge hear you say that, Miz Oates, he'd fine you fifty dollars.

MRS. OATES. He can't collect what I don't have.

Anyway, do you think I'm afraid of Roy Bean?

RANGER. No, ma'am. I 'pect you're terrified of him just like ev'rybody else.

(JOHNNY-BEHIND-THE-ACE enters DR. He is a mean looking cuss, guns on his hips and a grin on his face. SPURS, his henchman, is with him. Everyone reacts when they realize the bad men have entered. Note: Director may wish to add one or more bad men to Johnny's gang.)

RANGER (putting his own gun on the counter). Most folks enter by the front, Johnny.

JOHNNY. I ain't most folks, Ranger. (Eyes the gun.) No need for shootin' irons. (Walks behind table to left of ORIN tauntingly. SPURS leans against the wall by the DR doorway.) I jus' want to make sure Orin here don't take it in his head to hightail it outta town.

ORIN (strong). Wouldn't get very far, would I? With you and the Judge after me.

JOHNNY. And the desert, Orin, the desert. Why, it's meaner than Spurs here. (SPURS laughs, then JOHNNY. Infuriated, ORIN springs to his feet, grabs at Johnny's shirt. JOHNNY slaps for his gun. The women scream. Everyone not standing jumps to his feet. RANGER fast-draws his own gun and speaks with a commanding voice.)

RANGER (leaning over the counter, gun ready). Ev'rybody sit back down 'fore I get angry. (Then.) Do as I tell you. (All sit.) Johnny, you and

Spurs sit over yonder 'til court begins. (He motions JOHNNY to bench R.) Move. (JOHNNY crosses to the bench. He and SPURS are standing side by side.) Sit. (Together, they slowly sit on the bench.)

(MONTANA enters from L. She is a young journalist with a compulsion to get ahead in the male-dominated society of the West.)

RANGER. Dinin' room won't be open for a spell yet.

MONTANA. I'm more interested in finding Judge Bean than I am in dining.

RANGER. Didn't you see him on the platform?

SPURS. Judge always meets the trains.

MRS. POWERS. A nasty-lookin' critter with small beady eyes . . .

MRS. HAYES. With a battered derby hat. Hardly ever takes it off. Like it wuz part of his head . . .

MRS. OATES. Meanest man in Texas . . .

JOHNNY. Half-man, half-alligator--that's ole Roy Bean. (JOHNNY and SPURS laugh.)

RANGER. He'll be here shortly, I reckon.

MRS. HAYES. Sit down, dear. That train ride can be wearyin'.

MONTANA (sitting in left chair at DLC table). Thank you. (She takes out a pad and pencil from her pocketbook.) I hope the Judge will consent to an interview. From all I've heard he's a difficult man.

MRS. OATES. Interview? What for?

MONTANA. My paper. I'm a journalist.

MRS. HAYES (politely). I'm a Republican myself. Miz Oates here is a Democrat.

MONTANA. I wasn't speaking of politics.

SPURS (to JOHNNY). What's a journalist?

JOHNNY. A person who takes journeys.

SPURS. Oh.

MONTANA. I'm afraid none of you understand. A journalist is a reporter. I write about things.

MRS. HAYES. What things?

MONTANA. People, events--things.

MRS. OATES. Doesn't sound like a decent job for a woman.

MONTANA. Times are changing, Mrs., uh, ----

MRS. OATES. Oates.

MONTANA. Mrs. Oates. I foresee a day when women will not only be accepted as journalists but doctors and lawyers as well. Some day we will have the vote. (RANGER, JOHNNY and SPURS laugh heartily at this. The women are annoyed at the male chauvinism.)

(TWO WOMAN PASSENGERS enter from off L. They cross to RANGER at the counter. Note: Additional train passengers can be added if desired. The important thing to remember is to keep the stage placement of characters as uncluttered as possible.)

1ST WOMAN PASSENGER. Is this the waiting room?

RANGER. Yes, ma'am. Waitin' room for the Southern Pacific.

2ND WOMAN PASSENGER (looking around). Looks more like a saloon.

RANGER. Used to be, ma'am. But the Judge, he don't hold with such beverages. Only thing you can git in here is sarsaparilla, strong coffee and mineral water. Mineral water comes bottled so it costs a bit more.