

Showdown At Bitter Creek

A western comedy in two acts

by

Bill Gasper

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Cast of Characters

12M/14W

Mae East	Saloon Girl (25)
Molly Flannigan	Saloon Girl (25)
Fanny Small	Saloon Girl (26)
Carrie O'Banion	Saloon Girl (23)
Sally McGee	Saloon Girl (7)
Cactus Joe	Prospector (14)
Miss Hilary	Saloon Proprietor (48)
Jed Parker	Bartender (19)
Mayor Will E. Wynn	Bitter Creek Mayor (69)
I.C. Black	The banker (41)
Harlan Barrister	The lawyer (31)
Sadie Black	The banker's wife (11)
Becky Tapper	Telegraph operator (27)
Doc Mendum	Local doctor (41)
Sheriff Bill/Dapper Dan	Town sheriff/land speculator (61)
Mavis Ledsetter	Local publisher (28)
Black Bart	Gunslinger (116)
Judge Abe S. Korpus	Local judge (65)
Curly	Bart's associate (34)
Gus	Another (38)
Slim Chance	Local deputy (40)
Prudence	President, Ladies Society (26)
Mildred Smith	Member of Ladies Society (38)
Ima Blue	Member of Ladies Society (39)
Polly Pureheart	Local school marm, most recent member of Ladies Society (22)
LaTasha LaRue	Bart's girlfriend (49)

COSTUME NOTES

As noted in the script, the play takes place over several days. Unless desired, it is really not necessary for the actors to change costumes to denote the passage of time. The only costume change needed is SHERIFF BILL when he changes to DAPPER DAN and then back to SHERIFF BILL. The last change is relatively quick, so have the actor remove his coat and hat and replace with vest and different hat. Members of the ladies society should be wearing dresses made out of calico if possible since there is a reference to it. They also need to be carrying handbags. The characters of CURLY and GUS should be dressed as “dime store” cowboys with brightly colored fringed shirts (blues, pinks, greens) with coordinating cowboy boots and hats.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

TIME: The 1860s

PLACE: Bitter Creek, Kansas

ACT ONE

Scene One: The Short Branch Saloon. Late Afternoon.

Scene Two: An alley. Later that evening

Scene Three: The Short Branch Saloon. The next day.

ACT TWO

Scene One: The Short Branch Saloon. One week later. Evening.

Scene Two: The Short Branch Saloon. The next morning.

Scene Three: A city sidewalk. The next morning.

Scene Four: The Short Branch Saloon. Later that day.

Scene Five: The Short Branch Saloon. The next day.

SHOWDOWN AT BITTER CREEK

ACT ONE

Scene One

SETTING: The Short Branch Saloon. A pair of swinging SALOON DOORS leading to the outside are located in the UPSTAGE CENTER wall. Another door DOWNSTAGE RIGHT enters into a hallway that leads to a side door of the saloon, a storeroom and living quarters. A bar runs along the STAGE RIGHT wall. To the LEFT of the saloon doors is a window. DOWNSTAGE from the stage are a series of round tables, three of which are placed in a row DOWNSTAGE. Other tables, if desired, can be placed UPSTAGE of these tables. Paintings and other decorations dot the walls

LIGHTS UP: JED, the bartender, is behind the bar cleaning things up. He is dressed in dark slacks, white shirt, and a colored vest with a brightly colored elastic garter on each arm. JOE is snoozing at the DOWNSTAGE LEFT table. JOE is a grizzled old prospector that lost his way somehow on the way to California. MAYOR, I.C. and HARLAN are seated at the DOWNSTAGE CENTER table and are involved in an important conversation. MAE, FANNY, CARRIE and MOLLY are DOWNSTAGE RIGHT CENTER practicing a simple dance step without music, kicking one foot up at a time. They are wearing dresses commonly worn by saloon girls or dancers of the period. MAE is having difficulty with the simple step and kicks her right foot up when the others are kicking their left.

FANNY: *(In a slow cadence.)* Left...Right...Left...Right...Left...You're other left Mae...Right...Left...*(MAE tries hard get in step but can't. The girls stop.)* What's wrong with you, Mae? You're even worse than usual.

MAE: I don't know. It must be these new shoes.

MOLLY: Where'd you get those anyway?

MAE: Down at the dry goods. Why?

MOLLY: I was just wonderin' if you had to buy two pairs?

MAE: Now, why would I want to do that?

MOLLY: So you can have one shoe for both of your left feet.

MAE: Very funny Molly. How would you like one of these left feet planted in your backside?

MOLLY: I'd like to see you try it!

MAYOR: Ladies! Please! We're trying to have a meeting here!

MOLLY: I'm sorry mayor. It just seems this day has gone on forever. Things have been really slow. *(She SITS at the DOWNSTAGE RIGHT table as MAE walks right and leans against the bar).*

MAYOR: Don't you think we don't know that? That's what we've been discussin'.

FANNY: *(Crosses to the men's table)* Seems to me that's all you've been doing...discussin'. When're we gonna see some action?

MAYOR: Now hold on just a doggone minute. These things take time. Harlan here is

handling the legal work and I.C. has promised the bank's support. Ain't that right, fellas?
(Both MEN nod their heads in agreement.)

I.C.: You got it mayor.

CARRIE: I'm sure you men will work things out.

SALLY: (Comes rushing in saloon doors.) I'm here everybody.

FANNY: You're late, Sally.

SALLY: I know, I know, but they had a big shoe sale down at Binkelbaum's. They're going out of business, you know.

MOLLY: Did you happen to notice any odd pairs.

SALLY: What do you mean?

MOLLY: Well, we were just talking about how Mae needed special shoes.

MAE: Molly, I'm warning you.

SALLY: I don't get it. What's going on?

FANNY: Nothing. So you say Binkelbaum's is going out of business? That's too bad.

SALLY: It's worse than bad. It's downright tragic! Where am I going to buy my shoes?

MAE: You already have a room full of shoes, Sally.

SALLY: You can never have too many shoes. Someday, I'm going to open my own shoe store where everybody can afford to buy as many as they want. I already got a name for it...Payless shoe store.

MOLLY: Yeah...and if you do that, I'll have a name for you...penniless Sally McGee.

CARRIE: I think it's a great idea.

FANNY: Don't pay no mind to Carrie, Sally. She thinks tumbleweeds are beautiful.

CARRIE: Oh yeah? Let's get somebody else's opinion. What do you think, Joe?

JOE: (Wakes up.) Gold! Where?

CARRIE: Not gold, Joe. Shoes. What do you think about selling shoes?

JOE: Now what would I want to do that fer? I only have one pair...but I mite consider it if the money's rite. How much ya offerin'?

MOLLY: Never mind Joe. Go back to sleep.

JOE: Don't mind if I do.

SALLY: It doesn't matter what anybody else thinks anyway.

CARRIE: That's the spirit, Sally.

(HILARY ENTERS RIGHT)

HILARY: What's going on in here girls? You're supposed to be practicing your dance number.

MAE: What's the use, Miss Hilary. We haven't had a crowd in here since I don't know when.

HILARY: Now Mae, that's no excuse. You have to give a good performance no matter how many people show up.

FANNY: Mae's right, Miss Hilary. We've had the same five customers in here every Saturday night for better than a month. They've seen us so often, they're dancing along with us.

CARRIE: That's why we should learn some new numbers.

MOLLY: How we gonna do that? Jed only knows three songs on the piano. Ain't that right, Jed.

JED: Hey...I'm just the bartender. It's not my fault Miss Hilary had to downsize.

MAE: Downsize? What kind of word is that?

JED: It's just a fancy way to say the piano player got fired. I read it in a book.

HILARY: Jed, you've got entirely too much time on your hands. If you're not careful, you may be the next one to get....what'd you call it....downsized?

JED: Heck, I know that. That's why I'm takin' the time to get some learnin'.

MOLLY: Well, since you're so learnt, why don't you tell us where all our customers are?

JED: They're in Sweetwater.

FANNY: Sweetwater? What's Sweetwater got that Bitter Creek ain't got.

JED: A saloon.

MOLLY: What'd ya call this?

JED: Well, it may say saloon on the sign, but it's also the town hall and community center. Sweetwater used to be the same way, but I hear tell they got their town hall built so they don't have to use the saloon anymore for meetings and such. The saloon is now open every day of the week for those who want to enjoy the finer things in life.

I.C. Jed's right. Since Sweetwater got themselves a real saloon, all the ranch hands are riding over there.

MAE: So why don't we turn this place into a full time saloon? That'll get the business back.

HARLAN: We can't.

MAE: What do you mean, we can't? You own the place, Miss Hilary. You can do what you want, right?

HILARY: Afraid not. I'm just the proprietor here. The owner of the Short Branch moved back east six months ago. But before he left, he made a deal with the Bitter Creek Ladies Society that everybody could use the saloon until a new town hall is built.

CARRIE: Don't fret everybody. Things will work out.

FANNY: How come you always look on the bright side, Carrie? For crying out loud, if a flood went through town, you'd probably be grateful for the water.

CARRIE: It's always good to have water.

FANNY: See what I mean?

HILARY: Girls, we don't have time for this. Maybe you better go upstairs and gussy up a

bit.

MOLLY: Sure thing Miss Hilary. (*GIRLS EXIT RIGHT as HILARY takes her place behind the bar. A beat later, BECKY ENTERS in a hurry through the SALOON DOORS. She is carrying a telegram. Becky is a young woman and the local telegraph operator. She is a bit of a tomboy and wears pants and a shirt rather than a dress. She is excited as she moves quickly to the DOWNSTAGE CENTER table.*)

BECKY: Mayor, have you seen the sheriff? I have to talk to him now!

MAYOR: Now just calm down, Becky.

BECKY: Calm down!?! This is big!

HARLAN: (*Perks up.*) Big you say?

BECKY: Very big!

I.C.: Very big?

BECKY: Heck, its bigger than big...it's HUGE!!

HARLAN: Well....what is it, Becky? The suspense is killing us!

BECKY: (*Flatly.*) I can't tell you. This telegram is addressed to the sheriff, and I've looked all over town for him. How come you can never find a cop when you need one?

I.C.: Have you tried the donut shop?

BECKY: Donut shop!?! That closed up and moved to Sweetwater last week.

MAYOR: Now Becky, as duly elected mayor of Bitter Creek, I believe you can tell me the contents of that telegram.

BECKY: Sorry Mayor. I'm sworn to secrecy.

MAYOR: That's never stopped you before.

BECKY: True...but I still don't know if I should.

I.C.: Would you spit it out already!

BECKY: All right, all right. Keep your britches on. (*Looks around to make sure nobody is listening. HILARY and JEF pretend they are doing something else when BECKY looks their way, but as soon as she turns her head, they are listening intently.*) This telegram is from the sheriff up at Hays City. He's warning Sheriff Bill that Black Bart...

MEN: BLACK BART! (*The MEN, CACTUS JOE dive under tables facing the audience while JED and HILARY duck behind the bar.*)

BECKY: Fellas, you can relax. He's ain't here...yet. (*DOC ENTERS through SALOON DOORS.*)

DOC: (*Looks curiously at the men as well as other people under the tables and then moves to men's table. Others get back in their chairs.*) Howdy Becky. (*Looks at MEN under the table.*) What's wrong boys, lose a contact?

BECKY: Not exactly, Doc. I was just...

MAYOR: (*Cutting her off as HE, HARLAN, and I.C. quickly get off the floor and sit back in their seats.*) Uh...Becky dropped a nickel and we were just getting it back for her.

DOC: *(Sarcastic.)* Hmm...I see. I guess that's as good a reason as any why three of our leading citizens are crawling around on the floor of a saloon.

HARLAN: Never mind what it looks like. So...how ya doing Doc? Care to join us?

DOC: Why? Are you coming apart? *(DOC laughs at his own joke.)*

I.C.: *(Sarcastic.)* Ha! That's a good one Doc...at least it was the first hundred times or so that you said it.

DOC: Well...you crawl on the floor...I tell bad jokes. To each their own I always say.

BECKY: Like I was saying...

MAYOR: *(Cutting her off.)* Don't you have to go find the sheriff, Becky?

BECKY: Uh...yeah. I do. *(Waits.)*

MAYOR: Well, what are you waiting for?

BECKY: My nickel.

MAYOR: Just go!

BECKY: All right, I'm goin'...but remember, you owe me a nickel. *(BECKY exits through SALOON DOORS.)*

DOC: *(Looks towards bar. Calls out his order.)* Hey Jed! I'll have a double decaf mocha latté with extra soy foam please.

JED: A what?

DOC: *(Explaining.)* I'm lactose intolerant.

JED: You're who?

DOC: Just get me a cup of coffee.

JED: That I can do.

DOC: *(Sits.)* Okay...what's going on?

HARLAN: What'd ya talking about Doc?

DOC: What'd you mean, what am I talking about? I come in here to get a cup of coffee and see Becky with a telegram and find you guys hiding under the table. Speaking of which, where is my coffee? *(Looks toward the bar.)* Jed! Where's my coffee?!

MAYOR: Patience doc.

DOC: If I had any patients, I wouldn't be here.

MAYOR: We just don't want you getting yourself all riled up. We don't want you to have another heart attack. We need a doctor in this town.

DOC: Yeah, yeah...whatever.

JED: *(JED serves coffee to I.C., HARLAN, MAYOR and then DOC.)* There ya go Doc.

DOC: About time. What did you have to do? Wait for Juan Valdez to ride in this morning?

JED: You're awful grumpy today, Doc. Maybe you oughta lay off the caffeine. It'll help you sleep.

DOC: (*Sarcastic.*) Thank you Doctor Jed. Does that advice come with the coffee or do I have to pay extra? (*JED shrugs his shoulders and returns to the bar.*)

I.C.: Jed's right. You've been real grumpy lately.

DOC: Sorry about that, but things are pretty slow right now...and it didn't help my disposition any when I came in here and saw your heinies sticking out from under the table.

MAYOR: Things are bound to get better.

DOC: Well...maybe if you all shed a few pounds.

MAYOR: No! I meant the town. Things'll get better in Bitter Creek.

DOC: I don't know about that. Ever since Sweetwater built their town hall, things have gone south...five miles south.

HARLAN: I know. We were just talkin' about that. Things are bad all over town.

HILARY: (*Approaches table.*) Howdy boys. Can I get you something?

MAYOR: Sure Hilary. I need something a little stronger than this coffee.

HILARY: Sorry Mayor, it's Tuesday. You know the rules.

MAYOR: That's right, it is. I forgot. Give me another coffee then.

HILARY: I'll get that right over. (*She leaves and goes back to the bar.*)

MAYOR: Tuesday, huh? I can't keep this confounded schedule straight. Let's see....Tuesday's the weekly meeting of the Bitter Creek Gossip Society, right?

I.C.: Uh mayor...that's the Bitter Creek *Ladies* Society.

MAYOR: Same difference. All I know is tomorrow will be a busy day.

HARLAN: Why's that Mayor?

MAYOR: Because after their meeting every Tuesday, Prudence corners me bright and early Wednesday morning to let me know about all the problems in town. So and so's dog is loose....somebody's horse left a deposit on their sidewalk...Fred and Ethel Finklefunk are fighting again. The list is endless.

HARLAN: Well, you know how that group is...they tend to make a mountain out of an anthill.

MAYOR: The problem is, Harlan, they're building those mountains right here in the saloon. With all these women coming and going all the time, the men are staying away. That's bad for business and bad for Bitter Creek. If we don't get that town hall built real soon, we might as well bend over and kiss our kiesters goodbye.

HARLAN: I never thought I'd see the day when women would come and go as they please at a saloon.

I.C.: I know. Back home, I used to go into the saloon to get away from the misses. Now, she can pop in at any minute. Sure takes the fun out making a fool out of yourself.

DOC: Don't look now, I.C., but I do believe your better half is headed this way.

I.C.: See what I mean. (*SADIE ENTERS through SALOON DOORS*)

SADIE: You hoo...I.C. (*Approaches table.*) There you are. I've been looking everywhere

for you.

I.C.: Well, I...

SADIE: (*Cutting in.*) I was just over at the bank and you weren't there, so I figured you must be in here. You always are. (*Notices others.*) Oh...hello everyone.

HARLAN: Hello Sa...

SADIE: I don't mean to bother you...

I.C.: Too late. Already have.

SADIE: Did you say something, I.C.?

I.C.: Well, I....

SADIE: Doesn't matter, I guess. I just came over to have a cup of tea with Thelma and her new beau. Have you seen them?

I.C. Well, I...

SADIE: I wonder where they could be. Shouldn't surprise me, I guess. Thelma's always late, isn't that right, I.C.

I.C. Well, I...

SADIE: You know...Thelma's boyfriend just came in on the stage from Boston. I just think it's wonderful that we have a visitor from the east. Don't you think it's wonderful, I.C.?

I.C.: Well, I...

SADIE: Of course you do. We don't get many visitors here anymore. I wonder why. Can you explain that mayor?

MAYOR: Well, we were just talking...

SADIE: Sweetwater's the place to be. I heard they have a new town hall and are building a new school. Have you heard that, Mayor?

MAYOR: As a matter of fact, we...

SADIE: It's probably not my place to say, but maybe you fellas should spend more time working on the town's problems and less time drinking coffee in the saloon.

I.C.: Now Sadie...

SADIE: Well...enough of this idle chitchat. I'm starting to worry about Thelma. I wonder where in the world she could be. If you don't mind, I think I'll just go outside and see if I can find her. Bye everyone.

MAYOR: Bye. Nice *talking* with you. (*Watches her leave.*) Wow...that wife of yours can rattle on a mile a minute. How do you ever get a word in?

I.C.: That's usually all I get...one.

HARLAN: I feel for you, I.C.

I.C.: Don't. It's actually kind of nice. All I have to do is smile and nod my head once in a while.

MAYOR: So...where were we?

I.C.: We were talking about women in saloons.

MAYOR: Oh yeah...how could I forget? A saloon is no place for a woman that's all I got to say. Pretty soon, they'll want to vote and hold office.

HARLAN: Don't worry Mayor. That'll *never* happened.

(SHERIFF ENTERS through SALOON DOORS. He has a confident manner about him and is dressed in denim pants, brightly colored shirt, a vest with a badge, cowboy boots and white hat. He wears a gunbelt.)

SHERIFF: *(Sees the men.)* Howdy boys. *(The men all wave or say howdy as the SHERIFF heads to the bar.)* Miss Hilary, you're looking wonderful today.

HILARY: Why thank you, Bill. How nice of you to notice.

SHERIFF: Maybe I can stop by later and we can take a buggy ride.

HARLAN: Hey sheriff, when're you going to make an honest woman out of Miss Hilary.

SHERIFF: *(Uncomfortable.)* You mean like...uh...get married?

I.C.: Sure. You've been going together for better 'n two years, and we just want you to be as happy as the rest of us. Right fellas?

HARLAN: *(Not too excited. Flatly.)* Yeah...happy.

DOC: *(Flatly.)* That's us.

HARLAN/DOC/MAYOR: *(Flatly)* Happy.

HILARY: Now boys, quit pickin' on the sheriff. I'm sure he'll get around to poppin' the question when he's ready. *(Suggestively.)* Won't you Bill? *(MEN at table laugh and resume their private conversation.)*

SHERIFF: Jed, bail me out here. Give me a cup of coffee.

HILARY: *(Smiles.)* You big chicken. *(SHERIFF returns the smile as BECKY ENTERS through SALOON DOORS and approaches the bar.)*

BECKY: Sheriff! There you are! I've been looking for you everywhere!

SHERIFF: What is it, Becky? You're jumping around like a mouse crawled up your pants.

BECKY: I just got this telegram from Hays City and...*(whispers the news in his ear.)*

SHERIFF: BLACK BART! *(The MAYOR, I.C. and HARLAN all jump out of their seats at the news. DOC, meanwhile, is in the middle of drinking his coffee. He jumps up and sprays JOE at the next table, which awakens JOE.)*

BECKY: *(To everybody.)* Not yet!

JOE: *(Holding his hand up as if it is raining.)* Hey Jed, I think the roof is leaking again.

MAYOR: *(To Joe.)* Go back to sleep Joe. *(To others.)* I wish Becky would quit doing that!

DOC: So that's why you were under the table? Why didn't you tell me sooner? That kind of surprise is bad on the old ticker.

MAYOR: That's exactly why we didn't tell you. We were worried about your health. *(The MAYOR moves toward the bar. The other MEN follow.)* What're you going to do sheriff?

SHERIFF: Well mayor, there's not much I can do.

HILARY: You can run him out of town, that's what you can do.

SHERIFF: You must have a short memory, Hilary. Don't you remember? The last time I butted heads with Black Bart, his uncle...the honorable Judge Abe S. Korpus laughed at me and threw the case out of court. The only way I can get Bart is if I catch both him and that no good judge redhanded. But I can't worry about that now. I just remembered I have to go out of town.

MAYOR: What? You can't leave us now. Black Bart's on his way as we speak. Who's going to protect us from that scoundrel?

SHERIFF: Sorry, Mayor. I gotta go. *(He makes a quick exit out the SALOON DOORS.)*

MAYOR: Well, I'll be hornswaggled.

HILARY: Me too. He promised me a buggy ride.

MAYOR: I never thought I'd see the day that our sheriff would show a yellow streak.

HILARY: *(Defending the Sheriff.)* The sheriff's not yellow, Mayor. He's the kindest, bravest person I've ever met.

MAYOR: I used to think that too Miss Hilary...that is until he lit out of here like a cat that just sat in a bowl of turpentine.

HARLAN: The question is...what're we going to do?

MAYOR: I don't know. I guess it's up to Slim to protect the town.

I.C.: The deputy? He couldn't hit the ground with his hat if he had three tries.

MAVIS: *(Enters through SALOON DOORS. She is the owner of the local newspaper and wears a dress of the period.)* What's going on? I just saw the sheriff riding out of town like there's no tomorrow. If something excitin's going on, I want to put it in the Tattler.

MAYOR: I afraid it's *bad* news, Mavis. Becky just read the contents of a telegram, and the sheriff took out of here like a scalded dog.

MAVIS: *(Excited. Pulls out a pad and pencil, ready to take notes.)* Wow! This must be big! Somebody rob the stagecoach?

MAYOR: Nope.

MAVIS: *(A little less excited.)* Somebody steal a horse?

MAYOR: Nope.

MAVIS: *(A little less excited.)* Somebody's cat stuck in a tree?

MAYOR: Nope.

MAVIS: Well, good grief. What is it then?

BECKY: Black Bart's headed this way.

MAVIS: Black Bart!

BART: *(ENTERS through SALOON DOORS. He is a mean looking hombre dressed in all black. He wears a black double gumbelt with black handled revolvers and perhaps has another gun tucked in the front of his gumbelt. He sports a wicked looking mustache and three-day growth of beard on his face. His voice is growly and rough.)* Did somebody say

my name? (*Upon seeing the outlaw, JED ducks behind the bar as EVERYBODY gasps and takes a step backwards towards the bar. JOE wakes up and sees Bart and tumbles out of his chair.*) What's the matter everybody? Ain't you glad to see me? (*Laughs as lights dim and curtain closes.*)

ACT ONE Scene Two

SETTING: Later that night. A back alley somewhere in Bitter Creek played in front of the main curtain. The scene is dimly lit. JOE is on stage with a large gunny sack. He appears to be looking for something. BART ENTERS LEFT. As he speaks he moves slowly toward CENTER stage.

BART: Judge? (*Sees JOE RIGHT. He moves to him.*) Judge, is that you? You ain't the judge.

JOE: Never said I was.

BART: Who are you old timer?

JOE: Name's Cactus Joe. Came here from Californy 'bout six months back.

BART: What're you doing back here?

JOE: Lookin' for nuggets.

BART: Nuggets? This is Kansas partner. The only nuggets you're gonna find back here are the ones the rats left behind.

JOE: I know that...I grew up here. Gives me somethin' to do, I guess. Can't sleep.

BART: How's come.

JOE: I don't know. I 'spect it's 'cause I slep all day.

BART: How come you left California?

JOE: Would you believe I don't like the ocean?

BART: Not really.

JOE: How 'bout that I missed the long cold winters and hot dry summers?

BART: Nah.

JOE: How 'bout that I like lookin' over miles and miles of prairie without a tree in sight.

BART: You're broke, ain't ya?

JOE: Yep.

BART: Well...here's a dollar old timer. I suggest you move along.

JOE: Thanks, Mr. Bart. You ain't as bad as people say.

BART: Yeah well...if you tell anybody 'bout this, you'll be singin' soprano...understand? Now git! (*JOE EXITS RIGHT as MILDRED and IMA ENTER LEFT.*)

MILDRED: This way Ima.

IMA: Where are you going, Mildred? Oh dear, this is bad, very bad.

BART: (*BART hears them, whirls around and pulls his gun.*) Who's there?

MILDRED: (*Startled.*) Please don't shoot! It's just Mildred Smith and Ima Blue.

BART: (*Holsters his gun.*) What are two doing back here?

IMA: Who's asking, Bub?

BART: I am. And the name's not Bub.

MILDRED: Oh my, it's you. I didn't recognize you at first. Uh...sorry to disturb you, but we were just taking a little walk.

BART: In an alley?

IMA: (*Glancing around and then focusing on Bart and waving at the air.*) Smelly. Very smelly.

MILDRED: Uh...actually, we were just taking a shortcut.

BART: Well...you almost took a shortcut right to the cemetery.

IMA: Either you're new here or a big nincompoop because the cemetery's on the other end of town.

BART: Huh?

MILDRED: Uh...don't play no mind to my friend. We'll move along.

BART: You do that.

IMA: Who are you to tell us what to do, you big galoot.

BART: Listen sister, I've had about enough of your lip. You're lucky I'm looking for somebody. (*BART EXITS LEFT.*)

IMA: (*Shouting after him.*) Oh yeah? You're lucky you're walking away. Who was that ruffian?

MILDRED Don't you know? That's Black Bart.

IMA: Black Bart!? Oh my goodness. I called him Bub. I called him a nincompoop. I called him a big galoot. This is bad. Very bad.

MILDRED: Don't worry, Ima. He won't remember us.

IMA: Won't remember!?! You told him our names!

MILDRED: Well, he's meaner than a rattlesnake. You best stay out of his way.

IMA: Too late for that, thanks to you and your shortcut.

MILDRED: What are you going to do, Ima.

IMA: The only way to deal with a rattlesnake is look him straight in the eye.

MILDRED: Yeah

IMA: (*Cinches up her dress.*) You don't back down.

MILDRED: Yeah.

IMA: (*Spits once in each hand and rubs them together.*) You grab him by the tail and beat his head against a rock.

MILDRED: You go girl. I'm with you sister. (*With that, IMA and MILDRED strike a body building pose.*)

BART: (*Reenters.*) Now where in tarnation could that judge be? (*Sees the two.*) Are you two still back here?

IMA/MILDRED: (*Very timidly in unison.*) No. (*They run off RIGHT.*)

BART: What got into those two? (*JUDGE ENTERS LEFT and walks up behind BART. The JUDGE is a distinguished looking gentlemen. He wears a nice suit and hat of the period.*) Now where could that judge be?

JUDGE: I'm right here.

BART: (*Startled as he makes an uncharacteristic high pitched squeal.*) Great balls of fire, Judge! You scared me. You should know better'n to sneak up on a man like that. I dang near soiled my pants.

JUDGE: Soiled your pants? I thought you was so tough.

BART: I am...when I'm the one doing the sneakin'.

JUDGE: I see a couple of years in jail haven't changed you much, Bart. You always were a low lying, back-shootin' snake.

BART: Why, thank ya judge. That means a lot comin' from you.

JUDGE: Now don't you be getting all sentimental on me Bart. I may have helped raise you after you're daddy got shot down, but that don't mean I like you.

BART: So why do you always want me around then?

JUDGE: Because I find you useful. That's why I sent for you.

BART: (*Matter of factly.*) Oh...now I get it. Who do you want me to blast this time?

JUDGE: I don't want you to blast anybody. In fact, the opposite is true. I want you to be legitimate.

BART: Legitimate? What's that's supposed to mean?

JUDGE: It means you're going do things legal.

BART: That don't sound like much fun.

JUDGE: Do you want to go back to jail?

BART: Well, no....

JUDGE: Then listen up, knucklehead. I have a plan that's going to make us both rich, and it's completely legal...at least most of it anyways.

BART: What'd ya got in mind?

JUDGE: I'm sure you heard by now that the sheriff lit out of town when he heard you were coming.

BART: Yeah...I never figured him for a yellow-bellied sapsucker.

JUDGE: Me either, but now that he's gone, my plan will go even more smoothly.

BART: How's that judge.

JUDGE: Because first thing tomorrow morning, I'm going to appoint you sheriff.

BART: Sheriff!?! Me!?! That's crazy!

JUDGE: Yep...crazy as a fox. With you as sheriff, we can get things done a lot quicker.

There'll be nobody standing in our way.

BART: To do what?

JUDGE: A couple of days ago I received a letter from the territorial governor. It looks like the railroad is going to reroute its mainline right through Bitter Creek.

BART: So?

JUDGE: How come you're such an idiot? Oh yeah...I forgot. You used to chew the paint off your crib, didn't you? The railroad means that Bitter Creek will boom and all the land around it will be worth a lot more money. With your help, we're going to own that land and then...

BART: ...when people come, we can sell it and make lots of money.

JUDGE: Hey Bart, you're getting smarter by the minute.

BART: But why would anybody sell us their land when they know the railroad's comin'?

JUDGE: Nobody knows yet. The railroad won't announce their decision for another six months. That's why we have to move fast. Everybody in Bitter Creek is already worried that the town is going to dry up and blow away. They'll be more than happy to sell us their property.

BART: How we gonna pay for it?

JUDGE: That's where you come in. You're going to muscle your way into the Short Branch and take over. We'll use the money we make there to start buying property.

BART: Will that be enough?

JUDGE: Probably not. We're gonna have to find us a sucker...I mean investor...to help us out some. In the meantime, we'll get pledges from all the landowners to sell us their property. When we come into some money, we'll pay 'em off.

BART: Sounds like it might work.

JUDGE: What'd ya mean, might? With your muscle and my brains, we can't miss.

BART: What about my girlfriend, LaTasha LaRue? She's coming in on the stage tomorrow morning.

JUDGE: No problem. She can help run the saloon.

BART: I guess it's settled then.

JUDGE: Well...there is one more thing.

BART: I was afraid of that. What is it?

JUDGE: You know my brother Art, right?

BART: Yeah...what about him?

JUDGE: He has a couple of boys who are out of work right now. They've been living with their mother back east. I was wondering if you'd take them under your wing. You know...show 'em the ropes.

BART: Yeah sure. We'll need all the help we can get.

JUDGE: Great. Let me introduce them to you. (*Calls off stage LEFT.*) Hey, Curly! Gus!

You can come back here now. (*CURLY and GUS ENTER LEFT. They are anything but gunslingers. They wear brightly colored pants and shirts with fringes and coordinating cowboy hats that are bit too big. Their pants are pulled up way to high, exposing their cowboy boots, which should be white, red or the color of your choosing — anything but brown or black. Their gunbelts are also worn much too high. BART doesn't know how to react. He only looks at them with his mouth open in stunned silence.*) Boys...I want you to meet Black Bart, one of the meanest hombres that ever walked this earth. Bart, this is Curly and Gus.

CURLY: (*Speaks in a high pitched voice.*) Howdy boss. Name's Curly. I want to thank you for this opportunity.

GUS: (*Also possesses a high-pitched voice.*) Same here, Bart. My name's Gus.

BART: Judge...you've got to be pullin' my leg. You expect these two yahoos to be part of my gang.

GUS: Business associates.

BART: Huh?

GUS: You said gang. The more appropriate term would be business associates. (*CURLY nods his head up and down in agreement.*)

BART: Business associates? Why you're nothing but a couple of dimestore cowboys. (*Reaches for his guns.*) I oughta shoot you both right now. (*GUS and CURLY scramble behind the JUDGE for cover.*)

CURLY: (*Peeks out from behind the judge.*) You're right uncle Abe. He's a big meanie.

JUDGE: Now Bart, just relax. You take these two or the deal's off. Without my help, you'll just end up right back in jail.

GUS: (*Sticks his head out between the judge's legs.*) Yeah! What do you think of those apples?

JUDGE: Gus, you shut up or I'll shoot you myself.

GUS: Yes sir, your highness.

JUDGE: What's it going to be Bart?

BART: I don't know. I'm thinkin' I'd rather spend time in jail than with these two sissies.

JUDGE: They're really not bad after you get to know them.

BART: (*Grudgingly.*) Oh...all right then. But they better stay outta my way or else.

JUDGE: I'm happy you see it my way, Bart. Boys, you go with Bart...and behave yourselves.

CURLY: (*Salutes.*) Yes sir, your majesty.

BART: C'mon girls. Let's go. (*Turns right to exit.*)

GUS: (*Taps Bart on the shoulder.*) Pardon me. But I find that term girls just a little bit offensive.

BART: (*Turns back to Gus.*) Oh you do, do you? (*Loudly.*) Well, it ain't half as offensive as I find you. Now do me a favor and keep your pie hole shut. (*Turns to leave.*)

GUS: Sure boss.

BART: (*Turns back. Threatening.*) And don't call me boss. (*Turns to leave.*)

GUS: Whatever you say boss.

BART: (*Stops. Visible Drop of Shoulders.*) It's going to be a long day. (*BART exits with GUS and CURLY following closely on his heels.*)

JUDGE: (*Watches them leave.*) Thank goodness I'm rid of those two ninnies. (*Lights fade.*)

ACT ONE Scene Three

SETTING: The Short Branch Saloon the next day. The MAYOR, I.C., DOC, HARLAN and SLIM are gathered around the DOWN LEFT table. SLIM is checking over his sidearm and looks down the barrel of his gun as the conversation begins. JED and HILARY are at the bar.

MAYOR: Well then...is everybody agreed that Slim here should be the new sheriff?

I.C.: Not so fast Mayor. Slim, are you absolutely sure you can handle this job?

SLIM: (*SLIM is the local deputy. He is a young, short fellow who is rough around the edges. He wears ill-fitting pants, shirt, vest with badge, boots and a big cowboy hat. He wears a gunbelt and sports a few days growth on his face. Upon being addressed by I.C., he lowers the gun and waves it around as he points at the men as he talks. They flinch or move away as he points the gun their way.*) You darn tootin' I can. I've been workin' with Sheriff Bill for almost two years now. If not me, who?

HARLAN: I admire your confidence, Slim.

SLIM: (*Proudly looks at his gun.*) Thank you Harlan. I just bought it down at the general store. Paid two dollars for it.

DOC: (*Ignoring him.*) He's going to need a lot more than confidence when Black Bart starts causing trouble.

SLIM: You fellas don't know much about guns do ya? This ain't no...what'd ya call it...con-fe-dents. This here's a Colt 45.

I.C.: That thing isn't loaded is it?

SLIM: What'd ya think I am, stupid? I took all the bullets out. Look. (*Raises it up to fire. The MEN all cringe. Clicks the trigger. Nothing. The MEN relax. SLIM addresses the audience.*) Admit it. You all thought this thing was going to go off, didn't ya? I told ya it was unloaded. (*Raises the gun and pulls trigger. This time it goes off. The MEN all jump. SLIM looks at the gun.*) That's strange. I took five bullets out.

DOC: That's why they call it a six shooter, Slim.

MAYOR: I don't know, Slim. You really think you can handle Black Bart?

SLIM: Black Bart don't worry me none. I may not be able to outshoot him, but I can durn well outsmart him.

HILARY: (*To Jed*) Outsmart him? That's a laugh. If Slim shot one of his toes off, he couldn't count to 20.

MAYOR: Did you say something Hilary?

HILARY: Uh...no Mayor. I was just talking to Jed about some of the supplies we need around here.

MAYOR: Well...are there any other questions? If not, let's get on with it. We have more important things to discuss...like getting a new town hall built.

I.C.: I agree Mayor. Let's see what happens. Congratulations Slim.

SLIM: Thanks fellas. You won't be sorry.

DOC: I hope not Slim...for your sake. Business is slow right now, but I really don't want to be fixing bullet holes in your ugly hide.

SLIM: That wouldn't make me too happy neither, Doc.

MAYOR: Of course, Slim, your appointment is contingent upon Judge Korpus' endorsement.

SLIM: Yeah...and he'll probably have to give his okey-dokay, too, right?

MAYOR: (*Resigned.*) Yes Slim, his okey-dokay. But don't worry about it, he's always gone along with our decisions in the past. Now...let's get back to what we were discussing yesterday before all the excitement broke out.

HARLAN: Here here. Let's get that town hall built.

I.C.: I can hardly wait until we can get a real saloon where everybody's drinkin' and cussin' and fightin' and gettin' thrown in jail... (*PRUDENCE, MILDRED, IMA and POLLY ENTER through saloon DOORS. All the women wear dresses and hats of the period. Prudence, Mildred and Ima are the same age as the men, while Polly is younger. She is the school marm and dresses appropriately.*)...and where women ain't allowed. (*The WOMEN approach table.*)

PRUDENCE: Good morning gentlemen.

MAYOR: Morning Prudence. Ladies.

PRUDENCE: If there's one thing we can count on in this town, it's you men polishing your usual seats.

HARLAN: (*Tips his hat.*) Happy to oblige, Prudence.

IMA: Sad. Very sad.

MILDRED: Why don't you do something constructive and get the town hall built so we don't have to meet in this blasted saloon.

HARLAN: Funny you should mention that. We were just talking about how wonderful it would be for you to have your very own meeting place.

POLLY: (*Sarcastic.*) I bet.

DOC: Polly Pureheart? Is that you? I have to admit I'm a bit surprised our local school marm is spending time with this group. Don't you have children to teach? Bells to ring?

POLLY: I have issues, Doc...

DOC: (*Aside*) Don't they all?

POLLY: ...and the Bitter Creek Ladies Society is the best place to address those issues.

I.C.: My wife has lots of issues...but I haven't talked to her in three weeks.

PRUDENCE: Typical man...ignoring his wife.

I.C.: Nah...that's not it at all. I just didn't want to interrupt her. (*The MEN all laugh.*)

DOC: Good one, I.C.

PRUDENCE: Slim! (*SLIM immediately stops laughing*).

SLIM: Yes ma'am.

PRUDENCE: I would expect better behavior from you.

SLIM: Yes ma'am.

HARLAN: Now Prudence, don't go nitpickin' on our new sheriff.

MILDRED: New sheriff? Whatever are you talking about?

MAYOR: I presume you heard that Sheriff Bill took off...

PRUDENCE: Of course, but...

MAYOR: Well, we took matters into our own hands and appointed Slim to take his place.

IMA: Slim? Sheriff? Sad. Very sad.

POLLY: That's great news. Congratulations Slim.

SLIM: (*SLIM stands up and moves next to POLLY.*) Thank ya Polly. I'm also gettin' a raise in pay, so maybe now I can come a courtin'.

POLLY: That would be fine, Slim. Just fine.

DOC: Don't do it, Slim.

SLIM: Do what?

DOC: Start courtin'. Before you know it, you'll be getting married...and I don't have a cure for that kind of affliction.

IMA: Not funny. Not funny at all.

DOC: Who's trying to be funny? I'm just talking from experience.

SLIM: Now Doc, you know that Polly and me have been dotin' on each other for a long time.

DOC: Dote all you want Slim. Just don't tie the knot. It'll be just like putting a noose around your neck. (*As he says the next line, he holds his hand above his head and pretends he is holding a rope. His voice also becomes constricted as he chokes himself.*) It'll get tighter and tighter and tighter and before you know it, you won't be able to breathe. (*The MEN all rub their throats as if they know the feeling.*)

POLLY: Well I never....(*Begins to cry.*)

MILDRED: There there Polly.

PRUDENCE: See what you did Doc.

DOC: Truth hurts.

SLIM: Oh Polly, please don't cry. Don't pay no mind to Doc. Ya know I think you're as purty as a prize hog.

POLLY: Oh Slim, you know just what to say to cheer up a girl.

I.C.: Yep...he's a charmer all right.

PRUDENCE: Come on ladies. We have better things to do than waste our time with these hooligans.

IMA: True. Very true.

MAYOR: What brings you in here anyway, ladies? I thought your regular meeting was yesterday.

MILDRED: It was. But with the Fourth of July Celebration coming up, we have a lot of planning to do.

PRUDENCE: But don't worry mayor, I haven't forgot about our little meeting later this morning.

MAYOR: (*Flatly.*) Yippee. (*The LADIES leave and SIT at the table DOWN RIGHT. They mime a conversation. After watching the ladies depart for a beat.*) Thanks a lot fellas. You really got their feathers ruffled. I have a feeling my meeting with Prudence is going to be a long one.

HARLAN: (*Chuckles.*) I pity you mayor...but better you than me.

MAYOR: (*Sarcastic.*) Thanks for you support, Harlan.

SLIM: Well, I best be moseying along. Ya know...check out the town...make sure everything's quiet.

MAYOR: Sure Slim. Good idea. (*SLIM EXITS as MAVIS ENTERS through SALOON DOORS.*)

MAVIS: Morning gentlemen.

MAYOR: Howdy Mavis. What brings you in here?

MAVIS: I was just passing by and saw you men carrying on. It kind of looked liked the Tuesday afternoon gossip meeting.

I.C.: I can assure you Mavis, men *do not* carry on and they *certainly* do not gossip.

MAVIS: (*Sarcastic.*) Yeah...whatever. I'm sure you were discussing important business.

I.C.: That we were.

MAVIS: Anything I can write about in the Tattler?

HARLAN: Actually, we just appointed Slim as the new sheriff.

MAVIS: Slim!? Sheriff!? He don't stand a chance against Black Bart. I guess I better brush up on my obituary writing. Anything else going on?

I.C.: Nothing I can think of. Maybe you ought to go sit in with the ladies society. I'm sure they have all kinds of juicy gossip.

MAVIS: (*Irritated.*) I don't want that kind of news!

I.C.: I was just kidding, Mavis. You know something, you're as cantankerous as your old

man, God rest his soul.

MAVIS: You kind of get that way when you run a newspaper. Just last week, I got my ears blistered by Imogene Futzweiler over a little bitty mistake.

I.C.: What happened?

MAVIS: Well...she came into my office and handed me a story about her daughter winning some kind of an award at a hog judging contest and then she handed me a picture. Well, I was just trying to be polite and said, "My Imogene, your daughter certainly has changed since the last time I saw her." Well, I've never heard such language spewing out of a woman's mouth. She cursed me for 15 minutes. How was I supposed to know that picture wasn't her daughter?

DOC: Well, who was it?

MAVIS: It was a picture of the hog.

I.C.: I can see where you could make that kind of mistake. Imogene's daughter ain't much to look at.

MAVIS: That's what I thought. But you know how some people are...you just can't please 'em.

HARLAN: Well, don't worry about it, Mavis. Imogene won't hold a grudge for long. She'll get over it in a couple three years.

MAYOR: If you're looking for a story, maybe you can help us out. We've been discussing plans to raise funds for a new town hall and we can use all the publicity we can get.

MAVIS: That does sound interesting. I'll be glad to help. (*MAVIS pulls up a chair from the adjoining table and sits with the men, notebook at the ready. They all mime a conversation as CARRIE, FANNY, MOLLY and MAE ENTER RIGHT and move toward the bar.*)

FANNY: Mercy sakes alive. Look at all these people.

CARRIE: I told you things would get better.

FANNY: (*Mimicking.*) I told you things would get better.

MAE: What's going on Hilary?

HILARY: I don't know. I only caught bits and pieces of the conversation. Jed, you hear anything?

JED: Not much. All I can tell you for sure is that Slim has been appointed sheriff and that Black Bart's gonna shoot him full of holes. Then, Slim's going to put a noose around his own neck and everybody will celebrate on the Fourth of July.

MOLLY: For some reason, that don't sound right.

JED: I heard what I heard.

HILARY: Girls, why don't you go see if anybody wants anything.

CARRIE: Sure thing, Miss Hilary. (*The girls walk to the tables. FANNY and MOLLY to the men's table and MAE and FANNY to the women's table.*)

BECKY: (*ENTERS SALOON DOORS and walks to the bar.*) Howdy Jed...Miss Hilary. What's with all the people?

JED: I'd tell ya, but you probably wouldn't believe me. (*JUDGE, BART, CURLY, GUS & LATASHA ENTER through SALOON DOORS.*)

JUDGE: Mornin' everyone. (*Nobody pays any attention. Everybody continues with their mimed conversations.*)

JUDGE: (*A little louder.*) I said good morning everyone! (*Again nobody pays any attention.*)

BART: Let me handle this judge. (*Pulls out a gun and shoots it toward the ceiling. Everybody jumps and looks back towards the saloon doors.*)

JUDGE: That's better. Good morning everyone. (*Those in the bar ad lib "Good morning," "Hi judge," as JUDGE and ENTOURAGE move DOWN LEFT.*) I'm glad to see so many of you gathered this morning. I have a little announcement.

MAYOR: What is it judge?

JUDGE: Since Sheriff Bill lit out of town yesterday, I find it of utmost importance that we appoint a new sheriff as soon as possible.

MAYOR: We've already done that, judge. We decided to appoint Slim.

JUDGE: Slim? (*Laughs.*) You must be kidding? No Mayor, I have final say in the matter and I hereby appoint my nephew Bart as the new sheriff.

OTHERS: (*People react negatively. They boo and hiss and make ad libbed comments.*) Bart! No way! You must be joking! (*BART pulls out gun fires a round into the ceiling. Everybody with the exception of the Ladies Society change their tune from negative to positive and begin to applaud.*) Great idea! Why didn't we think of that!

BART: (*ASIDE.*) I knew they'd see it my way.

PRUDENCE: (*STANDS.*) What's wrong with you people? You should be ashamed of yourselves.

IMA: (*STANDS.*) Shame. For shame.

MILDRED: (*STANDS.*) We don't want Black Bart as sheriff. He's nothing but a low down, back shooting, scheming, conniving scoundrel.

IMA: And those are his good qualities.

BART: (*Politely.*) Thank ya ladies. It's nice of ya to notice. (*His meanest.*) Now sit down and shut up! (*PRUDENCE, IMA and MILDRED promptly sit.*)

JUDGE: Any more discussion? (*Nobody says a word.*) Good. I also want to introduce you to Bart's new deputies, my nephews Gus and Curly.

DOC: Gus and Curly? They look more like a Gussie and a Curly Q to me. (*OTHERS laugh tentatively, but BART finds this uproariously funny and laughs the loudest and hardest.*)

BART: Gussie and Curly Q! (*Laughs and slaps his knee.*) That's a good one! (*Continues to laugh hard.*)

JUDGE: (*Admonishing.*) Bart!

BART: (*Stops laughing.*) Uh...sorry judge.

JUDGE: Now as I was saying...

BART: *(Starts to snicker again.)* Gussie! *(Laughs hard. Others join in.)*

JUDGE: *(To Bart.)* Are you done? *(BART stops laughing as do others.)*

BART: Yeah. *(Begins to snicker again.)* Curly Q! *(Laughs hard again as do others in the saloon until BART sees judge glaring at him at which time he stops.)*

JUDGE: And this lady is Bart's girlfriend, LaTasha LaRue. She'll be running the saloon.

HILARY: Now wait a dang minute. I run this saloon.

LATASHA: *(She is a beautiful woman who is dressed very provocatively. She speaks with a southern accent.)* Not anymore sugar. I've heard this place is a very boring establishment. That, I can assure you, is going to change.

HILARY: What do you know about running a saloon?

LATASHA: Listen honey...I've been in some of the finest drinking establishments in the world.

HILARY: You do look like you're well traveled.

LATASHA: And what's that supposed to mean?

HILARY: Oh nothing. It's just that you look like you've seen the bottom of more than one whiskey glass.

LATASHA: Listen up, miss prissy pants. It takes a worldly woman to run a successful saloon. The Short Branch has seen its last tea party.

HILARY: You can't make any changes. I was hired to run this place by the owner, Charles Hobnob.

LATASHA: *(Looks around.)* So...which one of you gentleman is Charles Hobnob?

HILARY: He's not here. He's in Boston.

BART: Well, if he's in Boston, who's going to stop us? *(BART looks around. Nobody says a word.)* That's what I figured.

HILARY: When does this change take effect?

LATASHA: Right away.

CARRIE: Wait a minute. Today's Wednesday.

LATASHA: So?

CARRIE: Wednesday is karaoke night.

BART: What in the blue blazes is karaoke? Don't tell me they're starting to sell Chinese food here in Bitter Creek? What's next? Taco Tuesday?

LATASHA: Karaoke isn't a food, Bart. It's sort of entertainment. What they do is ask people to sing along with the piano player. They have a bunch of songs to pick from, and whoever's brave enough gets to pick one and sing it.

BART: Why that's the stupidest thing I've ever heard.

LATASHA: Don't worry, Bart. It'll be just like every other passing fancy and won't last long. Six months from now and people won't even have heard of karaoke. *(SLIM ENTERS).*

SLIM: What in tarnation is going on in here?

POLLY: (*Rushes to Slim's side.*) Slim, am I glad to see you. Black Bart and his hussy girlfriend are trying to take over the Short Branch.

SLIM: Is that so?

POLLY: And that's not all, Judge Korpus has appointed Bart as sheriff and his two weird looking cousins as deputies.

CURLY: Hey! Who are you calling weird looking?

GUS: I'll have you know these are the latest western fashions.

SLIM: Now hold on just a doggone second. The mayor appointed me sheriff. (*SLIM steps forward with his hand poised near his gun.*)

BART: Yeah...and the judge appointed me...and this town ain't big enough for two sheriffs. So what are you gonna do about it, runt?

GUS: (*Corrects him.*) Vertically challenged.

BART: Huh?

GUS: You said runt. The correct term is vertically challenged.

BART: I'll deal with you later. (*To Slim.*) Well, what's it gonna be...Mr. Vertically Challenged? (*He steps forward. Hands poised ready to draw. The people in the saloon scatter or duck under tables for protection from the impending gunfight. BART waits for SLIM to answer for a couple of seconds.*)

SLIM: (*Takes a couple of steps backward toward the bar.*) Are you talking to me?

BART: Yeah! I'm talking to you!

SLIM: (*Another couple of steps backward.*) You mean you want to know what I'm gonna do about it?

BART: (*Takes a couple of steps forward.*) Yeah you, the guy who won't be able to take a drink without springin' a leak.

SLIM: (*Another couple of steps backward.*) Well, I'll tell ya what I'm gonna do about it... (*snaps his fingers at which time JED hands him a broom.*) I'm a gonna sweep.

BART: (*Laughs.*) Sweep!?! Did you hear that? He's a gonna sweep! (*Laughs hard as everybody in bar lowers and shake their heads back and forth in disappointment as the lights dim and curtains close.*)

END of ACT ONE

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