COWBOIS

by Charlie Josephine

SAMUEL FRENCH

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CHARACTERS

JACK – a nonbinary trans masc cowboy (they/he)

MISS LILLIAN – a white woman, whose husband owns the saloon (she/her)

SALLY ANN – a God-fearing white cis woman, whose husband, Frank, is a miner (she/her)

MARY – a Black woman, a widow, mother of Kid, a farmer (she/her)

KID – a young boy with a touch of magic (he/him)

JAYNE – a school teacher, whose fiancé, James, is a miner (she/her)

LUCY/LOU – a Black farmer, AFAB nonbinary trans masc (she/her, then later they/he)

SHERIFF ROGER JONES – a cis man, an alcoholic, a good gun (he/him)

FRANK – a white cis man, Lillian's husband, the saloon owner (he/him)

JOHN – a white cis man, a miner, Sally Ann's husband (he/him)

JAMES – a Latinx or Black cis man, a miner, Jayne's fiancé (he/him)

GEORGE – a Black cis man, a farmer, Lucy's husband (he/him)

CHARLEY PARKHURST – a nonbinary person, a famous bandit and gun fighter (they/them)

TOMMY – a cis man, a bandit (he/him)

TOMMY'S TOOTHLESS BOYS – a gang of bandits (he/him)

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Script Notes
Stage directions are in italics and brackets.

A / indicates a fast run onto the next line, almost an interruption.

A /.. indicates where a word can't be found and the character does something else to express themselves. It could be a small pedestrian gesture or an abstract movement.

A . indicates where a character should have a line but for some reason are choosing not to speak.

Casting Preferences
If the character is trans, the actor must be. If the character is queer, the actor must be. Unless their race is specifically stated in the description above the actor does not need to be white, and probably shouldn't be. Actors are encouraged to perform this play in their own accents, despite the 1880s American vocabulary and iconography.

ACT ONE

Defrosting

(It's 1883, Wild West, USA. But it's also 2023, Swan Theatre, SUA. The world of this play straddles both these two times and places.)

(Lights up on **MISS LILLIAN** *praying. Halfway through she fiddles with the underwire of her bra. Tries to be godly, sighs, frustrated. Finishes her prayers. Gets up and opens the shutters, and we see that she is in fact in the middle of a saloon. She sits down with her breakfast. There's a sharp rap at the door. She tries to ignore it. The knocking returns, is persistent. She reluctantly unlocks the door.* **SALLY ANN** *bursts in.)*

SALLY ANN. Good day to you Miss Lillian!

MISS LILLIAN. Good day to/

SALLY ANN. oh I'm so pleased I've caught you! So pleased it's true! For I come on a matter of the most urgency, oh I'm not disrupting your breakfast am I?

MISS LILLIAN. Well/

SALLY ANN. what are you having there? Grits is it? With sugar or salt?

MISS LILLIAN. What, erm neither/

SALLY ANN. neither?! What, *nothing* on them?!

MISS LILLIAN. No?

SALLY ANN. Oh my! That's very queer! *Nothing on them?!* I must say I *always* add a little salt to mine, you should try that, try a little salt. Not too much of course, all things in moderation as the Good Lord intended. But yes just a little, to bring out the flavour, a pinch is all you need, what *nothing* on them? Very queer! And *black* coffee is it? No milk?

MISS LILLIAN. No. No I/

SALLY ANN. ah! Well! Each man to himself as they say. And I guess each woman too. The Good Lord did indeed make us all different!

MISS LILLIAN. Indeed/

SALLY ANN. indeed, and loves us all! Each and every one! All things bright and beautiful! In truth I thought I'd be interrupting your morning devotion, if interrupting anything at all, I of course don't care to intrude on anyone's precious time with The Lord, you have committed your soul to the Good Lord for the day?

MISS LILLIAN. I've, prayed, yes/

SALLY ANN. praise be! I'm very glad to hear so! And happy I didn't intrude.

MISS LILLIAN. Not at all/

SALLY ANN. it's just I'm driven by some *urgent* business. Business of the most urgency.

MISS LILLIAN. Is it about the pastor?

SALLY ANN. Have you news?! Oh god saves us all! God save us/

MISS LILLIAN. no! No I've no news!

SALLY ANN. Oh. But we must *have* a pastor Miss Lillian!

MISS LILLIAN. I know, which is why/

SALLY ANN. we *must*!

MISS LILLIAN. I agree! And that's/

SALLY ANN. a strong voice of reason and pillar of support, especially, under the current circumstances.

MISS LILLIAN. Yes, and that's exactly why/

SALLY ANN. I am of course happy to play my part. To be a servant to the Good Lord is my only wish, my *only* wish! But I simply cannot be responsible for saving the souls of an entire town, I am but one woman after all! Limited! By my position! By my sex! By my intellectual capabilities, by my/

MISS LILLIAN. Sally Ann! No one is asking you to save any souls!

SALLY ANN. We *need* a pastor/

MISS LILLIAN. I know! And that's why I wrote to the bishop in Georgetown. Wrote to Denver too. You were there when I wrote the letters, walked with me to the coach driver, watched him ride off with them in/

SALLY ANN. nearly *three* months ago!

MISS LILLIAN. What would you have me do? I can't *make* them reply any sooner than they're willing or able/

SALLY ANN. of course!

MISS LILLIAN. So then it is perhaps, as you say yourself, so often, an opportunity to practise patience.

SALLY ANN. I do say that, you're right… You know, it is of course above my station to even *think* it, but it's true I have often considered myself to have the capabilities of a great pastor. I believe I've been blessed with a great many talents that the position requires. Inspiring a crowd, for example, with a rousing/

*(***JAYNE** *enters.)*

JAYNE. oh Miss Lillian!

MISS LILLIAN. Good morning Jayne.

SALLY ANN. Good day to you Jayne/

JAYNE. it is *not* a good day, nor a good morning, decidedly it is not!

SALLY ANN. Whatever is the matter?

JAYNE. Dammit the new school books I ordered *still* haven't arrived!

SALLY ANN. Neither has a reply from the bishop, if you can believe/

JAYNE. I can't bear to begin a new semester with the same books the children have read through *seven* times already! I just can't bear it, oh are you eating, are we disturbing you?

MISS LILLIAN. Well I/

JAYNE. grits is it? Sweet or savoury?

SALLY ANN. Neither! She has them *plain!*

JAYNE. *Plain* grits?! How queer!

SALLY ANN. Just as I exclaimed! The very same! It *is* queer Miss Lillian to eat them with neither sugar nor salt/

JAYNE. I've plenty spare, if you need/

MISS LILLIAN. I couldn't remember, what I liked since, not since. So I've had them plain and/

JAYNE. grief does funny things to you, it's true.

SALLY ANN. Grief? Why Jayne, nobody's died!

MISS LILLIAN. Sally Ann, I'm sure Jayne didn't/

SALLY ANN. they're missing! Not dead!

JAYNE. It's still a grief to bear though is it not? This endless waiting?!

SALLY ANN. Speaking of them as though they're dead/

JAYNE. I wasn't! I was merely expressing/

SALLY ANN. dead and buried in the ground? How heartless!

JAYNE. Heartless?!

MISS LILLIAN. Ladies!

JAYNE. I see my sweet fiancé out the corner of my eye. Swear I could feel him beside me. Then I think of them all, trapped underground, and my blood runs cold/

SALLY ANN. and yet you speak of them so carelessly?

JAYNE. You're the one who's careless/

SALLY ANN. how dare you/

MISS LILLIAN. ladies please! It's far too early for quarrelling! Our husbands *will* return. They will have found gold. Our town will be saved. Jayne, I'll send a note to the bookstore in Denver tomorrow morning. Sally Ann, if we haven't heard by Monday I'll send more letters. You may watch me write them, again, if you wish.

JAYNE. I'm sure she does.

SALLY ANN. Good day to you both.

*(***SALLY ANN** *storms out of the saloon. Bumping into* **LUCY** *as she goes.)*

LUCY. What's caught her skirt on fire?

MISS LILLIAN. Never you mind.

JAYNE. Could be anything in truth, they easily catch.

LUCY. That they do. Mornin' all.

MISS LILLIAN & JAYNE. Mornin'.

LUCY. It's gettin' hot out already. Breakfast is it?

MISS LILLIAN. Was, cold now I suppose/

LUCY. grits is it?

JAYNE. With nothing on them!

MISS LILLIAN. Oh for god's sake!

LUCY. Nothing? I salt *and* sugar mine/

JAYNE. both?

LUCY. Both! Half each, then stir 'em together.

JAYNE. You don't!

LUCY. I do! Been that way ever since a young 'un. Never tried it?

JAYNE. Can't say I have.

LUCY. Well you're missin' out Miss Jayne!

JAYNE. I doubt that.

MISS LILLIAN. What can I do for you Lucy?

LUCY. Came to share bad news/

JAYNE. oh great/

LUCY. 'bout old Duke.

JAYNE. Oh no!

LUCY. Yup!

MISS LILLIAN. Oh no! Well I'm mighty sorry Luce. I know he was your daddy's horse.

LUCY. Sure was.

JAYNE. Was a fine beast.

LUCY. That too.

MISS LILLIAN. How'd he die?

LUCY. I shot him.

MISS LILLIAN & JAYNE. What?!

LUCY. Found him this mornin'. Knew instantly somethin' weren't right. His leg was broke, the bone poking right through.

JAYNE. Ugh!

LUCY. Knew straight away what my George would do. Got the shotgun and/

JAYNE. oh my!

LUCY. Don't mind admitting it took a while to muster up within myself, the courage to pull the trigger but, praise be I managed it.

JAYNE. Praise be? Well I must say I'm shocked!

LUCY. At what?

JAYNE. You shooting a horse dead is what!

LUCY. It needed doin'!

JAYNE. But not by you! Why, don't you know you're a lady?!

*(***LUCY** *squirms.)*

LUCY. Well, there ain't no men around!

JAYNE. Don't cha think I know that?

MISS LILLIAN. Ladies, let's not get too/

JAYNE. you think I've *forgotten?!*

LUCY. Well I don't know! It just seems a foolish thing to say/

JAYNE. oh so I'm a *fool* now too?!

MISS LILLIAN. Ladies!

LUCY. Seems to me that sometimes you gotta let go of being a lady to get things done.

MISS LILLIAN. We're just surprised is all.

LUCY. What would you have me do? *Wait,* for some *man,* to ride on through this godforsaken town that's barely on the map/

MISS LILLIAN. hey! That's not/

LUCY. for nothin' but the *joy* of it, cus Lord knows there'd be no other reason for visitin'! Wait for some man to shoot a dying horse that I could easily shoot myself except *I'm a lady* and lady's don't put poor beasts out their misery?

JAYNE. Hell! I still don't think I could shoot a horse! Makes my blood run cold to even consider it.

MISS LILLIAN. Me too!

LUCY. Well I did what I had to. No shame in that. If you want me to go I'll go/

MISS LILLIAN. of course not/

LUCY. just wanted a little company is all, maybe some coffee if you can spare some.

MISS LILLIAN. There's that there. I'll heat it for you.

LUCY. I'll have it cold, that's fine, you done with these grits too?

MISS LILLIAN. I/

LUCY. where's your salt?

MISS LILLIAN. I'll fetch it.

LUCY. And sugar?

MISS LILLIAN. That too.

*(***KID** *bursts in shooting his wooden gun and jumping on the furniture.)*

KID. Bang bang bang!

MISS LILLIAN. Hey! Careful! Careful! Get down from there!

KID. Bang bang *bang!*

MISS LILLIAN. Please get down from there before you/

MARY. GET DOWN! *NOW!*

*(***KID** *jumps down obediently.* **MARY** *enters.)*

KID. Sorry mama.

MARY. It's not my furniture you was jumping all over.

KID. Sorry Miss Lillian.

MISS LILLIAN. You're forgiven. But only cus you're so cute.

*(***MISS LILLIAN** *kisses the top of* **KID***'s head. He shrugs her off to go play. She watches him wistfully.)*

MARY. Where's Sally Ann at?

LUCY. Just missed her.

MARY. Ah! I miss her promising to pray for me. Best thing 'bout being a widow is you get all the patronising prayers.

*(***JAYNE** *and* **LUCY** *don't know where to look.)*

Ah come on I'm joking! It's been well over a year now, and still no one joins me in a little jest.

JAYNE. Don't seem much jest about the dead.

MARY. There's plenty believe me. And I hope you don't find that out for yourself anytime soon.

JAYNE. .

MARY. Any coffee goin'?

MISS LILLIAN. I'll brew some.

LUCY. Don't forget the sugar Miss Lillian.

MISS LILLIAN. Yes of course.

LUCY. And the salt.

MARY. Can't you get your own sugar n salt?

LUCY. She offered!

MARY. Well she shouldn't have! Always looking after everyone else, bet she ain't even eaten.

LUCY. You have ain't ya Miss Lillian?

MARY. You eating her breakfast?!

LUCY. You're drinking her coffee!

MISS LILLIAN. Ladies!

MARY. You know we're on rations/

LUCY. I know!

MARY. So why you eating her/

LUCY. I thought she'd finished!

MISS LILLIAN. Ladies!

SHERIFF. Ladies ladies ladies! It's a *beautiful* morning!

(The **SHERIFF** *staggers in, drunk and thirsty.* **MISS LILLIAN** *stops him getting to the bar.* **MARY** *jumps up to free her seat.* **JAYNE** *and* **LUCY** *instantly move anything fragile down the other end of the table.)*

It's beautiful! Beautiful! *Beautiful!*

MARY. *(Sarcastic.)* Sure is.

*(***MISS LILLIAN** *glares at* **MARY**, *and smiles at the* **SHERIFF**.*)*

MISS LILLIAN. What can I do for ya Sheriff?