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ATT'Y: LEAVE LEONA TO GOD'S PUNISHMENT

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By ESTHER PESSIN and MARVIN SMILON

Let God punish Leona Helmsley, her lawyer says. The hotel queen should be subject only to divine rule, he claims.

"If in fact she has abused and has mistreated people, I beg you ladies and gentlemen to leave that to a higher authority," defense lawyer Gerald Feffer told her jury.

All this testimony about tax evasion and extortion is nonsense, he insisted during an 8-hour summation that lasted longer than the entire defense case.

It's a rebellion by the little people — rescue her! he pleaded.

"Mrs. Helmsley has a lot of enemies. These people (the witnesses) came to pay her back. Their agenda was to get Mrs. Helmsley.

"You have the future of Mrs. Helmsley in your hands," he told the jury.

"Please don't compromise . . . I ask you, ladies and gentlemen, end the suffering, the long terrible suffering of Mrs. Helmsley. Let her walk out of this courthouse a free woman."

The hotel queen's lawyer — who called her a "tough bitch" in his opening statement — played God's bookkeeper yesterday.

The lawyer for one of her co-defendants was the court jester. Joseph Benfante — attorney

"Let her walk out of this courthouse a free woman."

ATTY GERALD FEFFER

for ex-Helmsley financial adviser, Joseph Licari — had the jurors, and everyone else, in stitches.

Even Leona, clad in black for her day in court, had to laugh at the defense lawyer's antics.

He portrayed her as the loony queen who embarrassed the kindly king — tycoon, Harry Helmsley.

Licari — Harry's former attendant — was just the poor schnook caught in the middle, he said.

"Joe Licari was Mr. Helmsley's Jiminy Cricket, his conscience. He would say, 'Harry, Mrs. Helmsley is spending your money again' and she went nuts.

"The queen did not want to go to the king for an allowance . . . Money was no object. Leona wanted to get it done her way."

Harry only dreamed up fake

invoices because he didn't want anyone to know how much money his wife was spending — and on what, Benfante told the jury.

"He didn't want everyone to know his wife was a little strange, his wife was beating up on him. Nobody, but nobody, knew what Mrs. Helmsley was going to spend, what she was going to do.

"Perhaps Mr. Helmsley was embarrassed that she spent \$500,000 on an ugly gray and brown [jade] buffalo. It was the ugliest buffalo I ever saw."

Benfante even brought along some props for his comedy routine — but the judge wouldn't let him use them.

The lawyer had flypaper, a magnifying glass — and a huge present for the IRS. It was wrapped in gold paper and had a card attached.

On the card was an orangutan saying "This is how I bought the braa."

Inside the gift box, were mounds of expense vouchers for all the things Leona got.

The jury will get the case today — and probably begin deliberating tomorrow morning.



HELPING HAND: Hotel queen Leona Helmsley arrives at court yesterday.

New York Post Lewis Lerner