

The Trial of Salomé (2007)

by Scott Sharplin

Theatre companies in Edmonton spring up every year dedicated to developing new plays, while many companies that have appeared since the early 1970s have retained new play development as a priority. The city thus entered the millennium as a hub of support for new writers—at least for workshops. Playwright David Belke has noted the “clear lack of systemic assistance for production-based writing. Nearly every playwright support system in Canada, including the Alberta Playwrights’ Network, is designed to serve development, not production” (3). Full productions of long-form new plays by emerging writers are rarities at established theatre companies in the city. The repeated argument from the local media and the theatre community is that a large number of very good new plays exist; if only there were sufficient opportunities to produce them. As critic Paul Matwychuk pointed out in the fall of 2005, the production of new plays in the city ebbs and flows.

Edmonton is supposedly a theatre-mad town—and yet, whenever I sit down to talk with a group of playwrights, talk inevitably turns to how difficult it’s become for a local writer to get a script produced by a professional theatre company.

This isn’t just the usual bellyaching. It seems as though substantial mainstage productions of new scripts by Edmonton playwrights have become the exception and not the rule.

But good scripts are out there.

Walterdale could potentially take the lead in the production of full-length new plays, while continuing to thrive on a useful and unique mixture of period fare and contemporary hits.

Within this context, it had been nearly twenty-five years since Walterdale produced a full-length new play when artistic director Scott Sharplin programmed his play *The Trial of Salomé* into the end of Walterdale's 2006/07 season. This slot had been reserved for the summer musical in the previous seven years, and the melodrama for thirty-five years before that.

When Sharplin was appointed Walterdale's artistic director in 2005, the Edmonton theatre set was already familiar with his work. An award-winning playwright, director, and administrator, Sharplin was born in Edmonton in 1974. He began writing plays at Victoria Composite High School and at The Citadel's Teen Festival of the Arts. At the age of nineteen he gained city-wide notice when he co-founded the Carnival of Shrieking Youth theatre festival in 1993, which has since become the city's longest-running youth-driven festival. In 1995 he founded Sound & Fury Theatre, primarily dedicated to modernizing and adapting classical works (particularly Shakespeare), but also to producing new works by Sharplin and a host of young playwrights. The company, which began producing full theatre seasons in 2000, made fostering new talent in the city its priority. Sharplin's savvy in finding government grant money to pay his company a guaranteed minimum, whenever possible, gained notice from other independent companies. He stepped down as Sound & Fury's artistic director in 2004 before the company integrated with Edmonton's Image Theatre in 2006. He has also served on the board of Alberta Playwrights' Network and as artistic director at Walterdale from 2005 to 2007. While directing *King Lear* (2006) and the Edmonton debut of *Antony and Cleopatra* (2007) at Walterdale, Sharplin maintained Internet blogs called "Lear Year" and "Stage Whispers," respectively, on which he recorded his ongoing experiences and musings while preparing and directing the productions. His original plays include *Purity Test* (2006, Chill Room Co-op/Fringe, winner of the 2002 Alberta Playwriting Competition), *Truth Factory* (2003, Lunchbox Theatre), *Burnt Remains* (2002, Sound & Fury/Fringe), *Troll Girl* (2002, Sound & Fury), and *Touch* (2000, Sound & Fury).

The Trial of Salomé is a historical comedy set during World War I when Canadian dancer Maud Allen played her ingénue role as Oscar Wilde's Salomé in London. When Roger Pemberton-Billing, MP, interrupts a performance of the Independent Theatre's production of *Salomé* in order to save the audience from certain lecherous intrigue, Allen announces that they will instead perform the trial, "Exactly as it was performed before the King's Bench." She casts Billing as himself in order to ensure authenticity (and Billing's consent). The play rolls through the World War I trenches and London's back stages and back alleys to chronicle British distaste for licentious discourse while also invoking the celebrity gossip columns of today. By including lines from Wilde's *Salomé*, trial transcripts, debates on ethics in the media of the day, and a deft dose of theatricality in the context of a nation at war, the play reaches its climax as Allen agrees to dance Salomé's Dance of the Seven Veils if the judge agrees to present plaintiff Pemberton-Billing's head on a platter. She dances...

The Trial of Salomé ran July 4–14, 2007, at Walterdale Playhouse (firehall) with the following cast and creative team:

MAUD ALLEN	Leslie Caffaro
ROGER PEMBERTON-BILLING	Denny Demeria
JACK GREIN	Nathan Coppens
ACTOR ONE	Bill Roberts
ACTOR TWO	Tania Gigliotti
ACTOR THREE	Amir Shah
ACTOR FOUR	Bradley Bishop
ACTOR FIVE	Lee Conrad
ACTOR SIX	Kelsie Acton
ACTOR SEVEN	Carolyn Barker
DIRECTOR	Amy Neufeld
STAGE MANAGER	Erin Voaklander
SET DESIGNER	Jim Herchak
COSTUME DESIGNER	Tara-Lee LaRose
LIGHTING DESIGNER	Joanne Soetaert Lantz
SOUND DESIGNER	Mark Senior
PROPERTIES	Jessica Haak
CHOREOGRAPHY	Heather Taschuk

The Trial of Salomé

by Scott Sharplin

Characters MAUD ALLEN, *the Salomé Dancer*
ROGER PEMBERTON-BILLING, *Member of Parliament, “The Prophet” (also plays The Marquess of Queensbury)*
JACK GREIN, *the Manager of the Independent Theatre (also plays Oscar Wilde)*

Actors in the Independent Theatre production of Salomé:

Actor one, who plays:

HEROD, *Tetrarch of Judea*
GENERAL SIR WILLIAM “WOOLY” ROBERTSON
BOWLER-HATTED BLOKE 1
QUEENSBUDDY 1
JUSTICE DARLING

Actor two, who plays:

THE YOUNG SYRIAN
TOMMY 1
SPY

Actor three, who plays:

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS
TOMMY 2
BOWLER-HATTED BLOKE 2
BOSIE (ALFRED LORD DOUGLAS)

Actor four, who plays:

RICHARD VON BEMTINCK, *German Foreign Minister*
DOCTOR SERRELL COOKE
BOWLER-HATTED BLOKE 3
QUEENSBUDDY 2
THE SEVERED HEAD

Actor five, who plays:

LORD BEAVERBROOK, *Minister of Information*
CAPTAIN HAROLD SPENCER
PROPSMASTER
BOWLER-HATTED BLOKE 4
YOUNG OSCAR

Actor six, who plays:

HERODIAS, *the Tetrarch's Wife*

EILEEN VILLIERS-STUART, *an agent provocateur*

Actor seven, who plays:

JANE SMUTS, *sister of the unsubstantiated assumption*

TOMMY 3

Setting London, April 1918. The final year of World War I.

Note A successful production will be fast-paced, with a crisp, slightly exaggerated delivery. Very little about the production should be naturalistic; settings can be suggested through very simple, overtly theatrical set pieces, props, lighting and sound.

Act One

Scene: The opening tableau of Oscar Wilde's Salomé. The Young Syrian and the Page of Herodias are reclining on the terrace outside Herod's palace.

SYRIAN How beautiful is the princess Salomé tonight!

PAGE Look at the moon!

SYRIAN She has a strange look.

PAGE She is like a woman rising from a tomb. An ageless face.

SYRIAN She is like a dancer who has silver doves for feet.

PAGE She is mad and sorrowful, reckless and repentant.

SYRIAN She is like the shadow of a white rose in a mirror of silver.

PAGE She sees everything and says nothing.

SYRIAN Perhaps she will dance. Do you think she will dance?

PAGE You must not look at her. You look too much.

SYRIAN Oh, she is rising! She is leaving the table!

PAGE It is dangerous to look at someone in that fashion.

SYRIAN She looks troubled.

PAGE Something terrible will happen.

SYRIAN She is coming this way!

PAGE How pale she is. She is a silver flower in a swift flood.

SYRIAN Do not look at her!

PAGE Yes, she is coming towards us.

SYRIAN Put out the torches! Hide the moon! Hide the stars!

PAGE She is like...

SYRIAN She comes! The princess Salomé!

PAGE She is—

Enter Billing, carrying a legal document. He is dressed as a British gentleman circa 1918, and his entrance totally destroys the mood.

BILLING Cease and forbear! Desist and discontinue! Cancel, terminate, and halt!

SYRIAN Who's this damp dishrag, then?

PAGE Admirer of yours?

BILLING No more of this obscene and rancid verbiage!

SYRIAN Now there, he must mean you.

BILLING I mean this filthy play! The play is over! *(to the audience)* Out!

PAGE Hang on a jif, there, mate.

SYRIAN The play's just gettin' started. Salomé's not even danced yet.

BILLING Nor shall she, now nor never. *(gives Syrian the paper. To the audience again)* Gentlemen and ladies—and I use the terms equivocally—

SYRIAN "By order of the Grand High Court of London—"

BILLING You are here under false pretenses.

SYRIAN "This twenty-third of April, 1918—"

BILLING You came to witness this insipid drama.

PAGE "Salomé by Oscar Wilde—"

BILLING I've come to liberate you from that fate.

SYRIAN "All performances repealed!"

PAGE "Re-pealed."

BILLING Yes.

PAGE Does that mean we've been pealed once already?

SYRIAN Naw, I told ya, Salomé's not danced.

PAGE Now THAT is what I call a pealing.

BILLING (*Grabbing the paper back*) It means bugger off back to your fleapits and stop spreading plague—

PAGE She's coming! Look!

SYRIAN Do not lay eyes on her!

BILLING Excuse me. What did I just say?

PAGE She is a spire of ivory that rises from the sea.

SYRIAN She is—

BILLING Now stop that! We've heard quite enough!

Enter Grein (instead of Salomé).

PAGE She's really not herself today.

GREIN Roger Pemberton-Billing, Member of Parliament.

BILLING Jack Grein, Theatrical Nancy-Boy.

GREIN This is a private performance, Mr. Billing.

BILLING That doesn't matter, Mr. Grein. The ruling is inclusive. ALL performances—

GREIN These gentle folk have paid their coin already. They await their art.

BILLING Oh, art? (*To audience*) It's art you seek?

GREIN A densely splendid tapestry of verse and drama—

BILLING If art is your intent, you'll find the British Gallery next door.

GREIN Please! Keep your seats!

BILLING They have a splendid painting of Sir Henry Irving playing Hamlet.

GREIN Irving is deceased, sir. These are theatre aficionados. They crave—

BILLING Crave? Live flesh?

PAGE The moon is rising.

BILLING Crude poetical conceits and pornographic choreography?

SYRIAN She is a perfumed breeze that carries secrets.

PAGE She is coming.

GREIN True art is neither moral nor immoral. It just IS.

BILLING Not anymore, it's not.

SYRIAN Hide the moon in sackcloth!

PAGE She is coming!

BILLING You were there. The Judge was firm.

SYRIAN I beg you not to look at her.

PAGE The princess!

BILLING *Salomé* is over. End of story.

PAGE She is here!

Maud Allan enters, dressed as Salomé. By now, the rest of the cast has assembled on stage also.

MAUD And now, the play begins.

GREIN You are a jot late on your entrance, Miss Allan.

MAUD Mr. Grein, the Lord our Saviour took three days to rise up from the grave. Thus tardiness is next to godliness.

BILLING A charming opener, Miss Allan. Blasphemy and hubris, very nice. Where shall you go from here?

MAUD I'm taking offers.

BILLING Take them somewhere else. *(To audience)* You've had your opportunity to gawk, it's what you came for. Now, by order of the Grand High Court of London, pry your filthy eyes off this slut's flesh and scuttle home.

GREIN Now see here!

SYRIAN No one speaks such words of this celestial—

PAGE Fear not, Miss Allan, I'll defend your honour.

SYRIAN I was doing so. You interrupted.

BILLING *(To Maud)* Did you truly think I'd let this pass?

MAUD Perhaps I merely hoped to see you one last time.

PAGE You think YOU can defend her honour?

SYRIAN If you'd let me—

GREIN Mr. Billing—

MAUD That is why you came, is it not?

GREIN Miss Allan—

MAUD To see me.

BILLING I have seen quite enough of you, of late.

MAUD Then look away.

PAGE Get in there. Start defending.

SYRIAN After you.

GREIN Please, everyone, please calm yourselves. We have an audience, a very cultured, dignified, impatient—

BILLING Squirming deviants. A press of orgiasts. That's right, you two, I see you pressing back there. Pervert proletariat.

GREIN Perhaps. But they did pay.

BILLING Then reimburse them. This play—

GREIN Sainted stars! That IS perverse!

BILLING This play is censored. One more word will land you all in prison.

The Syrian and the Page boo and hiss. Billing glares at them.

SYRIAN That wasn't from the play.

MAUD I believe I have a resolution. *(To audience)* Mr. Billing is correct, of course, the Bailey has declared the play of *Salomé* unfit for your discerning ears and eyes.

GREIN No refunds, no exchanges.

MAUD But your patronage is dear to us. And we would not have a gathering disperse unsatisfied. We therefore hope to offer you a drama, slightly modified, but of comparable excitement, stimulation, and release.

BILLING I shudder to imagine what you mean.

MAUD And I shall overlook your fear, Mr. Billing, so long as you can keep your shuddering from escalating. *(She claps her hands)* Ladies and Gentlemen, in lieu of *Salomé* by Oscar Wilde, the Independent Theatre presents a true account of recent scandals, intrigues, and litigious pandemonium in war-torn London.

BILLING You don't mean...?

MAUD All who seek accounts for this grand act of censorship shall be appeased, as we enact the accusations and the trial itself, its every word.

BILLING Oh, for the love of Ben.

MAUD The trial of *Salomé*. Exactly as it was performed before the King's Bench.

GREIN She's astounding!

PAGE What a brain within that head!

SYRIAN And what a pedestal beneath it!

BILLING No.

MAUD You do not wish to see your victory reflected on the stage?

BILLING You'd never show it truthfully.

MAUD Indeed; in fact, I promise to make you look good.

GREIN Ah, Mr. Billing is, of course, most welcome to remain, to verify the facts of the affair.

MAUD And to ensure that he himself is played with dignity.

BILLING And which of these iniquitous grease-painted poofs would play me?

The Page and the Syrian mimics Billing overtop of his line.

PAGE AND SYRIAN

And which of these iniquitous grease-painted...

MAUD You're correct, of course. No mere artiste could recreate your idiosyncratic self. And our account cannot proceed without a Mr. Billing in the wings. He is the prime attraction, after all. Wait! A thought occurs.

SYRIAN Stand back!

PAGE That brain again!

MAUD It's hazy, but I'm quite sure I recall ... yes, you were once yourself an actor, Mr. Billing. Were you not?

BILLING Well—

MAUD Back before you were a demagogue, I mean.

BILLING I s'pose I did—a few times—back at Oxford—

MAUD In your salad days ... when you were green in judgment, and morality?

BILLING I do suspect, Miss Allan, you are preying on my vanity.

MAUD And I suspect that there is much meat there to feed upon.

GREIN (*Claps his hands*) So it's settled! Jolly good!

SYRIAN A rousing re-creation of the trial that shook the nation!

PAGE Starring both the personalities who featured in reality!

BILLING But under MY direction—this must all be—

The actors bustle into new positions.

PAGE As the bullets rain on bodies off in Belgium and in France—

SYRIAN We present the great Maud Allan, the Sultana of the Dance—

PAGE Who had traveled here to act in our salacious interlude—

SYRIAN Until her Salomé was stifled by the scheming of a prude.

BILLING You see? That is precisely the malarkey up with which I will not put—

GREIN (*Running over Billing's line*) Now, where to start? Eh? That's the question.

MAUD Perhaps the moment of conception?

GREIN Yes! Oh, yes!

MAUD Eighteen hundred ninety-two. The fertile mind of Oscar Wilde lights upon a subject for a new play.

PAGE *Salomé!*

GREIN May I play Wilde? I do a splendid Wilde.

BILLING We do not need—

GREIN “Life imitates art, and art returns the favour.”

BILLING Drivel. That’s enough.

GREIN “It is the spectator, and not life, that art truly mirrors.”

BILLING No one needs to see a loathsome pervert writing horrid poetry.

MAUD He’s right, Mr. Grein. The scene would scarcely be dramatic.

GREIN But if we added Lord Douglas? Or a strapping young secretary—?

BILLING No. The beast Wilde’s play may have begun its wretched life in ninety-two, but this account starts now. Nineteen eighteen. England’s darkest hour. (*Claps his hands*) The Great War.

Another scramble, as the next scene is set up.

GREIN That IS dramatic.

MAUD Mr. Billing is a natural.

BILLING (*To the audience*) For four years, England’s star has sputtered balefully upon the Vosges and the Ardennes. Attrition and retreat. The Hun’s advance, relentless. Their barbaric rage seems poised to overcome the genteel sportsmanship and derring-do of British Tommies.

The Scene: In the trenches, two Tommies approach their commander, General Robertson. Both the soldiers are wounded. Incessant bombing above. Robertson sips tea and listens to a phonograph. Throughout, Billing whispers cues in their ears.

TOMMY 1 General, Sir! Private Biggs reporting from the Front, sir!

TOMMY 2 Private Mills reporting from the Back Front, sir.

ROBERTSON The Back Front?

TOMMY 2 Yessir. Seems the Huns have us surrounded, sir.

ROBERTSON Oh, jolly good.

TOMMY 2 Not ... really, sir.

ROBERTSON I'll be the judge of that. Reports?

TOMMY 1 Our Italian allies have been quashed at Caporetto, sir.

ROBERTSON Well, at least we have the French.

TOMMY 2 The French keep trying to surrender.

ROBERTSON To the Germans?

TOMMY 2 Yessir. Well ... to anyone.

ROBERTSON But, the Russians! Eh? Don't forget old Ivan, Private.

TOMMY 1 Sir. The Russians had their revolution last October. They've been quarreling with one another ever since.

TOMMY 2 I'm losing ... noteworthy amounts of blood, sir.

ROBERTSON Are you implying that we're out of allies?

TOMMY 1 No sir, not quite. The boys from Canada—

ROBERTSON Oh dearie dog. They're just as vulgar as the Huns.

TOMMY 2 A veil of red, across my eyes.

TOMMY 1 If only Britain could be made to see in what grave danger she has placed her children.

TOMMY 2 It is like a scarlet curtain plunged from Heaven.

TOMMY 1 Why does she ignore our cries for aid?

TOMMY 2 It is a purple shroud.

TOMMY 1 Is she both blind and deaf?

TOMMY 2 It is a silken winding sheet.

TOMMY 1 Or is some sinister and traitorous alliance holding back her hand?

ROBERTSON Hold up, hold up. I've got the ticket. What you need's a damn fine cheering up.

TOMMY 2 I hear the angels' wings. Like thunder!

ROBERTSON Patriotic culture. Good old British razzmatazz. Pip pip, eh wot? Make you right as rain. Let's see now...

TOMMY 1 Er ... sir ... it's Mills, he's...

ROBERTSON (*Begins tapping out a telegraph message*) Urgent, Lord Beaverbrook, stop.

TOMMY 1 I think it's more than just morale at stake, sir.

TOMMY 2 Look, there she is! The moon!

ROBERTSON Front line requests immediate assistance, stop. Send British acting troupes and pantomimes, stop.

TOMMY 2 She dances! How she dances!

TOMMY 1 Look away, mate. Look away.

Tommy 2 dies.

ROBERTSON One or two celebrities a bonus, stop. Always been partial to Sarah Bernhardt.

TOMMY 1 Cor, she's lovely.

ROBERTSON Full Stop.

Billing addresses the audience. Upstage, Grein prepares the next scene.

BILLING So our boys are still found, in dark tunnels of the earth. The poison seed of Germany is planted there, and swims across to British shores. The Hunnish spawn flows upward, through the corridors of law and power, and inseminates the inner chambers of our government—

MAUD Mr. Billing. We are not at Speaker's Corner. You lack a soapbox, which would make you tall. And your harangue, I fear to say, is far too illustrative for the theatre.

BILLING Miss Allan, I could never paint a more disclosing picture than the one you shame us with.

MAUD "Disclosing" is ambiguous. There is a chasm of distinction between you "disclosing" and I "dis-clothing." The one is moralizing, and the other, art.

Maud exits. The scene begins, startling Billing.

BEAVERBROOK That's it! It's art! That's what they need out there! Inspiration! Beauty!

GREIN I am utterly in your accordance!

BILLING Who said we were starting?

BEAVERBROOK Mister Grein, my dear, dear, Jack.

GREIN Lord Beaverbrook!

BEAVERBROOK Your nation needs you. Britain craves your art.

GREIN I'm yours entirely!

BILLING (*To audience*) I never witnessed this exchange. It may be fictional. A cock and bull—

SYRIAN I'll fix your cock an' bulls.

BEAVERBROOK As Minister of Information, I am hereby naming you Ambassador of British Culture. You have thirty days to choose a repertoire of hearty British theatre, and I mean ripping thick and meaty plays, man, really pounding patriotic spectacles. Can you do it?

GREIN I shall rise to the occasion.

BEAVERBROOK

There's a chap.

Across the stage, Billing has coordinated a separate scene, which interrupts the first.

ROBERTSON You've come at last, Herr Bentinck.

BENTINCK *Ja*, I have. General Robertson. *Mein freund*.

ROBERTSON I have the book.

GREIN What is this cloak and dagger tommyrot? This isn't relevant.

BILLING Just wait.

Robertson passes Bentinck a Black Book. He inspects it.

BENTINCK *Ja*, this is bloody *wunderbar*.

ROBERTSON We still need more. The list is not complete.

GREIN But I was, just now, I was in the middle—

BILLING Shush!

GREIN And I was interrupted—

BENTINCK It will be a book of fifty thousand names, *das men und women*, English all, but in our power. Servants of the big, blond German Kaiser.

GREIN Somebody! Miss Allan! Make him stop.

ROBERTSON Herr Bentinck, we require more names. But time is short.

BENTINCK We need a way to gather them together. English traitors.

Grein crosses back and his scene resumes. They alternate.

ROBERTSON I believe I have a plan.

GREIN Lord Beaverbrook, my repertoire is done.

BEAVERBROOK

Oh? Jolly good.

BENTINCK *Vas is, das plan sie got?*

ROBERTSON Er, yes, the plan...

GREIN I entreat you, ask me what I have selected.

BEAVERBROOK

Yes. Which plays?

ROBERTSON A spectacle. A lecherous display of fleshly ailments.

GREIN One play only, but a priceless pearl it is.

ROBERTSON

Perversion. That's what traitors of this ilk seek out.

GREIN A genius feast of art, and British through and through.

ROBERTSON They'll be there.

GREIN Beauty.

ROBERTSON Every sick, demented, and susceptible-to-blackmail one of them.

GREIN Poetry.

ROBERTSON The book will be complete.

GREIN Sublimity in word and motion.

BENTINCK What monstrous performance are you thinking of?

GREIN The masterpiece of Oscar Wilde—

ROBERTSON AND GREIN

(In unison) Salomé!

Maud Allan treats this as her cue to re-enter. She has changed into 1918 streetclothes, but she still looks fabulous.

MAUD That was a much more rousing introduction. A vast improvement over "do not look at her."

GREIN The inimitable Miss Maud Allan.

PAGE The Prima Donna of the Canadas.

SYRIAN Dancer to the crowns of Europe. Known from India to Edmonton for her intoxicating—

PAGE Magical—

SYRIAN And potent piece of choreography:

GREIN The Vision of Salomé.

MAUD Another life. When I was young, and scandal was in vogue.

Grein is now addressing his acting troupe. Upstage, Billing prepares the next scene with Spencer and Jane.

GREIN I've courted her from Canada. She was retired.

MAUD Wooed across the ocean with the words of Wilde.

GREIN Her famous dance will happen at the climax of our play. Thus, Oscar's Salomé and Miss Maud Allan's Salomé shall merge, to form—

SYRIAN Quintessent Salomé!

PAGE And that'll liven up the troops?

GREIN I think it will.

MAUD A Salomé so great she shall be spoken of by every mouth, in every ear.

SYRIAN I hear she danced for Persian princes once.

MAUD And la, the thing's they'll say!

PAGE I heard her dancing cured a blind man.

SPENCER Rot!

SYRIAN I heard—

SPENCER Blank poppycock!

SYRIAN I heard she was seen recreating after hours with the Lord Prime Minister.

GREIN It wasn't the Prime Minister.

SYRIAN Oh no?

GREIN It was his wife.

SYRIAN Oh, so!

PAGE Oh my.

MAUD My fellow thespians. I am ecstatic to embark with you upon this great artistic voyage. Our time is short, and we must use it well. I shall, therefore, be in my dressing room, practicing my climax.

She exits. Everyone but Billing stares after her.

SPENCER Pumpernickel! Canterbury! Spatchcock!

BILLING The scene now turns to Fleet Street, where the editors of one small patriotic ... (*Everyone is still staring the other way*) The scene now TURNS ... thank you ... to Fleet Street, where the editors of one small, patriotic newspaper are toiling to deliver truth and root out German insurrection.

SPENCER Ruddy insurrectionists!

BILLING *The Vigilante*. As in vigilant. Chief editor, yours truly, Roger Pemberton-Billing. Facts checker, Captain Harold Spencer, Special Forces.

SPENCER Doctor!

BILLING And on special discharge.

SPENCER Doctor Spencer! Who told ye Captain, eh? Who told ye that?

BILLING March twenty-fifth, 1918.

SPENCER Can't trust 'em, what they say. The ruddy sausage-eaters.

BILLING Captain Spencer—

SPENCER Doctor!

BILLING Very well, then, Doctor. We must keep our focus on the tasks at hand. The afternoon edition is about to print. I have to get to parliament in time for questions. And we lack a leading headline.

SPENCER How 'bout this, then? "Jerry Bosche-Buggerer in Every Bedroom in the British Isles."

BILLING Apart from the alliteration? No.

SPENCER I seen 'em, eh. Teutonic deviants ... in West End flats, erotomanically furnished...

BILLING This is not productive.

SPENCER Bars in Portsmouth ... then they hook 'em in, see, German gigolos, seduce an' sap the stamina of British sailors.

BILLING Actually, that isn't bad. (*Takes a few notes*)

SPENCER Then, in the throes of buggery, they spill their guts. Our plans, our numbers, the positions of our fleets ... and t'ain't just sailors on a bum-lark, neither. Generals, chiefs of staff, ay, members of parliament—

BILLING I am an MP, you know.

SPENCER The WIVES of members of parliament—

BILLING How fortunate that I'm a bachelor.

SPENCER In orgiastic ecstasy the secrets of our State have been betrayed!

BILLING Yes, ripping stuff, old boy, but we need proof.

SPENCER It's in the book, I tell ya. All their names in one perverted book.

BILLING You've seen the legendary Black Book?

SPENCER Who told ya? Who's been on about the book?

BILLING You have, Doctor.

SPENCER Captain!

BILLING Fine, whatever. Look, I have to run. We need a headline. Make yourself lucid and write something down. Can you accomplish that?

SPENCER Pish nappy pederast!

BILLING Yes, truly, this is England's darkest hour.

Jane Smuts enters, passing Billing as he strides offstage.

SPENCER (*Muttering to himself*) Ruddy blight, uranians, prick-pounding blaspheming puberty.

JANE I beg your pardon.

SPENCER Eh?

JANE Was that ... was that HIM?

SPENCER Who wants to know?

JANE Roger Pemberton-Billing? The Prophet?

SPENCER Hey, who's a bonny lass, then?

JANE Why do they call him "The Prophet"? Is it—

SPENCER Captain Harold Spencer, at yer service!

JANE Oh. I, cheers. I need to speak with him most urgently. I have some information—

SPENCER Succotash! Fudge ripple!

JANE Captain Spencer? Are you—

SPENCER Doctor.

JANE Sorry?

SPENCER Doctor Spencer.

JANE I thought you said Captain.

SPENCER Who's been tellin' ye what I been sayin'?

JANE You—well, you did—Doctor—

SPENCER Captain!

JANE Doctor Captain –

SPENCER Harold Spencer, Special Forces, Special Discharge, SIR!

JANE I think I'll leave now.

SPENCER Don't buy all ye hear about me, lass. Or anythin' ye read.

JANE Read—yes, yes, read, I read it in the *Times* this morning!

She hands him a news clipping.

SPENCER “Two private performances of *Salomé*, starring the Canadian Maud Allan, will occur on April ninth and tenth.”

JANE I thought he, maybe—I don't know, he seems to print things about scandals. And Miss Allan, with her dance, and all—well, mercy—

SPENCER “Applicants should contact Mister Jack Grein, nineteen Duke Street.”

JANE Do you think he likes to print such things? Or is it that he feels compelled? A higher force that urges him to root out vice?

SPENCER Ay, ruddy viceroys.

JANE So perhaps he'll print it?

SPENCER “Maud Allan,” “Canadian Maud Allan” ... there's a chime-tingler...

JANE And perhaps then I could meet him?

SPENCER Here's the neat and narrow. This will be our leading article. Miss Marbles, take this down at once!

JANE Sir ... my name is—

SPENCER “To be a witness to Maud Allan's filthy exhibitionism, one must first become a private member.”

JANE (*Struggling to write it down*) “To be ... witness...”

SPENCER “If the belly-shakin' scugs at Scotlard Yard had the bullocks to confiscate this list of members, they'd be lookin' at a hefty chunk o' names from out the Huns' Black Book itself!”

JANE I fear I cannot write the word “bullocks,” sir.

SPENCER Ay, the Black Book ... Sadists. Maso-kites. Necrophiles. Uranians.

JANE And—sorry, which one is Maud Allan?

SPENCER Sodomites!

JANE My hollyhocks!

SPENCER “Maud Allan” ... damn, but that’s a fine thought-knocker of a name.

JANE But can she—that is, I, I did not realize that ladies ... could be ... that.

SPENCER That? What?

JANE That word you said.

SPENCER Thought-knocker?

JANE Sod—som—soddom—

SPENCER Sodomite? Ay, bleedin’ willowy, the tonne of ’em. Ye can’t right sneeze these days without a pansy passin’ ye his silken la-dee-das.

JANE But LADIES. Surely ladies lack the ... apparati to be s—s—

SPENCER Naw, see, the female sodomite is every drop as dirty as the male. They do it differently, is all, they—see, there’s one that gets up on ’er—first, and then the lady number two, she’s sorta—well, that is—it simply isn’t for a lady’s ears to know what ladies do.

JANE Amen to that.

SPENCER But in the cause of journalistic accuracy, we must travel that dank path. *(He goes to the telephone)* Doctor Serrel Cooke, please, Ipswich four-nine-one. On a matter of utmost national importance. *(To Jane)* We shall consult a medical professional.

JANE But I thought you were—never mind.

Across the stage, Dr. Cooke answers the phone.

COOKE Doctor Cooke speaking.

BILLING Serrel! This is Harold.

COOKE Harold! How's your down-about? Has all the swelling settled down?

BILLING Er, something much more urgent, Doctor. We're in need of expertise upon a circumstance of national security. For the safety and survival of Dear Mother Britain, tell me quickly, Doctor: what do ye call it when two lasses stoke the stove together?

JANE (*Covering her ears*) Grandmother's begonias!

COOKE A question for the ages, Harold. Hippocrates believed it was impossible. But thanks to rational physicians of the day, we have an answer.

BILLING Swimming!

COOKE No, it's rather dry, in fact. It all revolves around a naughty little organ called the cli—

Grein interrupts the scene (with impeccable timing).

GREIN Now that will certainly be all we need to hear of that.

Billing comes back on stage. Maud will re-enter also.

BILLING Mr. Grein, my oily friend, do you recall the point of this recital?

GREIN Yes, yes, to tell, of course, what happened, but—

BILLING The truth. In all its grim veracity.

GREIN Our audience is scarcely set to hear such vulgar phrases.

BILLING Vulgar! What about Miss Allan's former costume?

MAUD I am glad you found it so provoking.

BILLING Truth. The social and immoral truths that weaken our defences from within. And yes, disgraceful anatomical truths also. Does anyone believe, beneath your harlot's garb, you harbour only silk and pearls?

MAUD Your comments show your lack of research, Mr. Billing.

GREIN I will simply not have that—that WORD ... with ladies present!

MAUD Oh, permit it, Mr. Grein. It's my belief that ladies who have not yet heard the word—nor probed its implications—are well overdue.

BILLING You still think this is all just titillation?

MAUD Once again, your anatomical expressions lack precision, sir. *(To Cooke)* I pray, continue with the scene, that everyone—including Mr. Billing—may depart endowed with knowledge.

COOKE Quite. Where was I?

SPENCER “Cli—”

COOKE Right. Cheers, sport.

SPENCER Not at all, mate.

COOKE “—toris.”

SPENCER Bonny Prince Charly! What the fadge is a cli-toris?

COOKE No one's really sure. But in the hands of certain female deviants, it's deadly.

JANE *(Still covering her ears)* Fellas and fillies like lilacs and lilies...

COOKE Rumours flourish of a monstrous sub-species of the female whose dexterous manipulations of the cli-toris have made all males redundant.

SPENCER Scotch and succubi!

COOKE My thoughts precisely.

SPENCER Just as ruthless Germans want to make all Brits extraneous. Ay, it fits together perfectly.

JANE It does?

SPENCER *(Hangs up the phone)* Miss Mackerel, here's a headline you can wager ought to make the Huns and perverts soil their lederhosen: are ye ready?

JANE I fear not.

SPENCER Too late! “The Cult of the Clitorites!”

Jane swoons. Billing serves as chorus while the scene hops about quickly.

BILLING And so *The Vigilante's* headline ran, March twenty-sixth.

BOWLER-HATTED BLOKE 1
The Cult of the who?

BILLING Harold Spencer's daring revelation left all London stupefied.

BOWLER-HATTED BLOKE 2
Clitorite? Now isn't that a kind of monk from Devonshire?

BOWLER-HATTED BLOKE 1
A breed of racing horse, I rather think.

BILLING So potent were its words, the article sent shockwaves through the nation—even to our British boys abroad.

In the trenches, a Tommy reads the article to his chums. They all collapse into uproarious laughter.

TOMMY 1 "To be a witness to Maud Allan's filthy exhibitionism, one must first become a private member."

TOMMY 3 Do the Clitorites need members?

TOMMY 1 Sign me up!

BILLING But other, more important parties were not laughing.

General Robertson and Herr Bentinck peruse the article, fighting to restrain their laughter.

ROBERTSON "If the belly-shakin' scugs at Scotlard Yard had the bullocks to confiscate this list of members, they'd be lookin' at a hefty chunk o' names from out the Huns' Black Book itself!"

BILLING Yes, these traitorous fifth columnists found Spencer's words completely serious.

BENTINCK (*Still stifling giggles*) Is serious, *ja*.

ROBERTSON Bloody serious. I'm very sobered by this, Bentinck.

BENTINCK I do not think I've been more humourless in all my life. And I am German!

ROBERTSON Who owns this newspaper, this *Vigilante*?

BENTINCK A man named Roger Pemberton-Billing.

ROBERTSON Ah yes, the Prophet. Is he on the list?

Bentinck consults the Black Book.

BENTINCK *Nein*, he's clean like kindergarten.

ROBERTSON Then he is a threat. This Clitorite claptrap is too close to the truth. He must be silenced. (*Bentinck hauls a German pistol out of his trenchcoat.*) Not like that, Bentinck. This is the twentieth century, man! Assassination is *outré*. The modern skullduggery is blackmail.

BENTINCK *Ja, ja, das blachenmail*. So tell me. Billing, what are his Achilles' heels?

ROBERTSON Well, he's rather young. Impetuous. And he's a bachelor.

BENTINCK You mean a *jiggen-mit-den-fraülein-herr*? Why did you not say so? (*Claps his hands. Eileen saunters into the spotlight.*) I have just the man for the job.

Scene change: Maud Allan enters, surrounded by a gaggle of production assistants. Grein tries to get her attention, a copy of the Vigilante in his hand.

MAUD Vexatious. Reprehensible. Intolerable. Ah, Mr. Grein, I hope your day is passing more agreeably than mine.

GREIN Er, not exactly, Miss Allan—

MAUD These costumes are caricatures. They invite lampooning. What are these supposed to be, exactly? Tails? Shall I be playing Salomé, or some Darwinian reject? Send it back.

GREIN Miss Allan—

MAUD And those sandals! Tell me now, however did you get two ploughman's lunches on such tiny little plates? Appearances are everything, my dears. It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances.

GREIN Well put.

PAGE She has the most intoxicating taste.

SYRIAN For a colonial, no less.

MAUD If our performance is to be the quintessential *Salomé*, then each detail, each pearl and stream and sequin must contribute to the myth. Our aim is to be whispered of in admiration in one hundred years.

GREIN Indeed, a hundred. Two!

SYRIAN I would have thought, as a Canadian, she would be most content in beaver furs, or bear skins.

MAUD Truly, all transcendent garments have an element of bare skin.

GREIN Ha ha! Very clever. But Miss Allan—

MAUD Now THIS outfit is TOO good. The hundred years of whispering must fixate on my face.

PAGE She has the most intoxicating face.

SYRIAN The face that launched a thousand lawsuits.

PAGE Now, don't get ahead of things.

GREIN Miss Allan, there is something in this tabloid that concerns us both.

MAUD Does it refer to me by name?

GREIN I fear it does.

MAUD Delightful. Let me know when every other rag in London does the same.

GREIN But you must read—or rather, I could summarize—oh dear—

PROPSMASTER
Your head, Miss Allan.

The Propsmaster lifts the lid from a silver charger, revealing the head of John the Baptist. Maud takes it.

MAUD Ah, Iokanaan. John the Baptist. How thy hair entwines about thy head. Thy hair is like clusters of grapes, like the clusters of black grapes that

hang from the vine-trees of Edom. The long, black nights, when the moon hides her face, when the stars are afraid, are not so black as thy hair. And thy mouth! Thy mouth is like a pomegranate cut in twain with a knife of ivory. Redder than vermilion, redder than the feet of those who tread the wine-press, redder than the feet of him who cometh from a forest where he hath slain a mighty lion. There is nothing in the world so red as thy mouth. Ah, Iokanaan, Iokanaan, thou wert the man that I loved alone among men! All other men were hateful to me. But thou wert beautiful!

Applause.

GREIN Sheer poetry!

SYRIAN She is a diamond among dirt!

PAGE A narcissus trembling in the wind!

MAUD (*Handing the head back to the Propsmaster*) Be sure to moisten his lips with jelly—just a dab—for when I kiss him.

GREIN That was marvelous, Miss Allan. Surely yours will be the finest Salomé to ever tread the boards. That is, if we are not undone by scandal first.

He finally gets her to read the Vigilante article.

MAUD “The Cult of the—” My word. I have a sudden urge to swoon.

She passes the article to Page, who reads (while she threatens to swoon).

PAGE “To be a witness to Maud Allan’s filthy exhibitionism...”

SYRIAN Slanders! Sullies! Slurs!

GREIN That part might actually boost ticket sales.

SYRIAN “Belly-shaking scugs ... the bullocks ...”

GREIN Yes, you see. It gets worse.

SYRIAN “ ... hefty chunk of names from out the Huns’ Black Book itself!”

GREIN And more cryptic.

PAGE Defamations! Calumny!

SYRIAN Unbearable vituperations!

GREIN Less than two weeks till we open.

PAGE Who dares write such lies about our tender moonbeam?

SYRIAN I shall call them to accounts immediately!

PAGE I was going to say that.

MAUD I must go.

GREIN What? Where?

MAUD To Canada. Or anywhere. Away.

GREIN You mustn't go! The play—

PAGE Fear not, Miss Allan. I shall find the scoundrel—

SYRIAN What he means is, *I shall find—*

PAGE You had your chance!

SYRIAN —And knock him into paste!

MAUD I cannot stay. The scent of scandal is perfume in moderation, but an excess can be cloying.

GREIN But the play—Lord Beaverbrook, Ambassador of British Culture—my entire future—

MAUD Find another Salomé.

GREIN Impossible! There IS no other Salomé.

PAGE I have the right to defend Miss Allan's honour.

SYRIAN I think not.

PAGE Let's have it then.

Page and Syrian politely engage in fisticuffs. Maud tries to escape the stage, but Grein keeps blocking her exits.

GREIN It's really not so bad, I mean, scandal is just gossip made tedious by morality, and tedium is simply nature's way of making truly brilliant moments stand apart, and if you leave, the tour shall be revoked, and what the devil do they mean by this, I mean it's rubbish, anyone can see, "The Cult of the—"

MAUD Mr. Grein. I opted not to swoon the last time. Do not force the issue.

GREIN Please. I'm begging you. There must be something I can do to make this right.

Maud goes over to Page and Syrian and gently stops them.

MAUD These fellows have an inkling, sir. But in an age of bellicose solutions, we of the aesthetic bent must find less violent means of compensation.

GREIN You don't mean...?

MAUD Fisticuffs are *outré*. The modern form of chivalry is...

Quick cut to a new scene: Billing and Spencer, reading a notice.

BILLING "... Immediate legal action." Bloody hell. They're going to sue us.

SPENCER Ruddy suzerains!

BILLING This is all your fault, you know. I'd *rather* you'd called her a tart and left it at that—

SPENCER Bilgewater! Trollop!

BILLING Now she's got the home field. The onus is upon us—

SPENCER Ruddy onanists!

BILLING Will you cease your maniac ejaculations for five minutes? We must think!

SPENCER Mouldy fig.

BILLING If we could prove your daft-wit allegations, we'd be fine. But Miss Maud Allan does not belong to any cult. You made it up.

SPENCER She's one of 'em! I know. There's something in her past, I just can't place it.

BILLING Well, until you place it, we are facing infamy, derision, and high legal costs. If we're not careful, they can shut us down.

SPENCER Ruddy shuttlecocks.

BILLING But till that happens, god forbid, we've still got something that she doesn't.

SPENCER Bullocks!

BILLING No, the printing press.

SPENCER Ahhh. In fer a penny...

BILLING We shall rake her systematically through every shade of muck. Before the courts can settle in her favour, we shall make the public come to loathe Maud Allan and the Independent Theatre.

SPENCER And that means...

Another quick cut, back to Grein and Maud Allan. Grein reads off a telegraph.

GREIN "Mr. Grein, your services as the Ambassador of British Culture are no longer needed, stop. There shall be no theatrical tour to the continent, stop. In fact, we never even spoke of such a project, stop. You may therefore, with all due respect, and at your earliest convenience ... stop."

MAUD Never. Do not heed them, Mr. Grein. The show, she must go on.

GREIN I thought you wanted to return to Canada.

MAUD That was a ploy to goad you into action.

GREIN Oh.

MAUD You don't know women very well, do you, Mr. Grein?

GREIN Does anyone?

MAUD Women defend themselves by attacking, just as they attack by sudden, strange surrenders.

GREIN We cannot afford to mount the play, not now. Without the sponsorship—

MAUD We have another benefactor. Mr. Billing will supply us with the backing.

GREIN Mr. Billing would rather sing on our graves, I think.

MAUD His tune will change. For once we win the lawsuit—

GREIN You seem very sure of victory. If you knew Mr. Billing—

MAUD Well, perhaps it's time I did.

Scene change: Page and Syrian serve as chorus.

PAGE Their first meeting!

MAUD Roger Pemberton-Billing.

SYRIAN On the front steps of the Parliament.

MAUD The Prophet, I believe they call you?

BILLING Guilty as charged.

MAUD Because you utter dire portents in the House of Commons?

BILLING Actually, I got the sobriquet at Oxford. I had a talent for predicting the flight patterns of young ladies.

MAUD You are a bird enthusiast!

BILLING When given time.

MAUD And what can you deduce of my activities?

BILLING You have migrated here from far away. Your plumage still carries the lustre of youth, but your wings have the guidance of age. And you may, perhaps, be seeking for a spot to make your nest?

MAUD You are astute, sir. But a songbird seldom settles quietly.

BILLING You are a singer?

MAUD Not exactly.

BILLING Then, an actress?

MAUD Only recently. My passion is the dance.

Beat.

BILLING Miss Allan.

MAUD I could not wait to meet the man whose moralistic sideshows threaten to upstage my comeback.

BILLING Your career is more important than morality? You have a sick view of the world.

MAUD Unlike your view of merely moments past?

BILLING Forgive my eyes, if they mistook you for an honest woman.

MAUD But a woman's virtue is forever being written by the eyes of men. In that regard, you are all prophets, of the self-fulfilling sort.

BILLING I don't have time for this.

MAUD Your readers have the time.

BILLING I have another job.

MAUD If you keep me from doing mine, I'll do the same to you.

BILLING There is a war on, if you hadn't noticed! British boys are dying while you gyrate on the stage.

MAUD And it offends you more that I can dance, than that they die?

BILLING Not so. They are the same offense.

MAUD Are you accusing me of—

BILLING When we meet tomorrow, at the arraignment, you will hear my accusations in full fusillade.

MAUD Perhaps your hormones have confused you. I am not the one on trial.

BILLING No? We shall see.

MAUD Until tomorrow, then, when one of us shall meet his match.

BILLING Until tomorrow.

Maud exits. Opposite, Eileen enters, unseen by Billing.

And before which time, it seems I must invent some accusations.

EILEEN Roger Pemberton-Billing.

BILLING Hello, yes?

EILEEN You are the man they call the Prophet?

BILLING Guilty as—I mean, well, yes.

EILEEN You must come with me at once.

BILLING Who are you? Have I printed anything unsavoury about you?

EILEEN My name is Eileen Villiers-Stuart. I am a loyalist, like you. And I have information.

BILLING Of what sort?

EILEEN Pertaining to the Black Book.

BILLING Moses on toast!

EILEEN Hush! Come this way!

They criss-cross the stage as they talk.

BILLING D’you mean the Huns’ Black Book? The list of British backsliders? I thought it was just one of Spencer’s loony tunes.

EILEEN I assure you, it is real.

BILLING But then, perhaps the rest is true as well. Perhaps there is a cult.

EILEEN (*Stopping them, turning to Billing, close*) A cult of Clitorites? You’re closer than you know.

BILLING Um ... close to where, exactly?

Behind them, Bowler-hatted Blokes circulate, surreptitiously goosing and fondling each other.

EILEEN This is where they congregate.

BILLING Where who...?

EILEEN Degenerates. Uranians. Nymphomaniacs. They're all the same. No moral fibre whatsoever, they would sell their country to the Germans for a ding-dong in the park.

BILLING It truly buggers—I mean beggars—the imagination.

EILEEN Get closer. Don't be shy.

As Billing inches towards the Blokes, a Spy pops up from another bush with a camera at the ready. Eileen sees him, and approves.

BILLING I must confess, I've always been a little curious—but no. I must resist.

EILEEN Oh no, you mustn't.

BILLING It is not for Christian eyes to see.

EILEEN Then get up close and listen.

BILLING Mrs. Villiers-Stuart—

EILEEN Miss.

BILLING I thank you for your patriotic zeal. But I must go.

EILEEN So soon? But surely—

BILLING Something in this place has got me rather bugged—BOTHERED.

Since the Spy hasn't got his photo, Eileen tries something different.

EILEEN But Mr. Billing, you are such a hero to me. Being here, this close to you, I scarcely can restrain myself.

BILLING Steady on, then.

EILEEN I believe that decent people like ourselves should be permitted peccadilloes now and then.

BILLING Oh, peccadilloes, yes? With marmalade?

EILEEN For saving Britain from the Germans is a long, hard task. And getting harder. Wouldn't you agree?

BILLING Miss—Miss Allan—I mean, Mrs. Villiers-Stuart—I mean, Miss, I mean—what, exactly, do you want from me?

EILEEN I want to roger, Roger.

They are nearly intertwined—and the Spy is about to snap a photo—but Billing hurls himself away.

BILLING I must resist. You are a most agreeable companion, but I have a task. There is a war. It must be won. And wars are won with tanks and things, and tanks wear armour, and they never take it off. Not even for a quickie.

EILEEN Mr. Billing, I was wrong about you.

BILLING Not at all. I'm still a man, inside my tank, you know.

EILEEN But other men are easily entrapped. You have the strength of your convictions.

BILLING Yes. God damn them.

EILEEN Mr. Billing, I believe I am in love with you. Hear me out. I came upon assignment, the fifth columnists decided you were dangerous. But now I am convinced that you alone can save this country from destruction.

BILLING This so rarely happens to me.

EILEEN How may I assist you, Roger? Besides—yes, besides that.

BILLING Right now, the welfare of the man you see before you—and, by extension, as you say, this country's ongoing existence, and all that—depends upon the outcome of a single, perilous event.

SYRIAN The trial of SALOMÉ!

PAGE Day One: The arraignment!

MAUD Wait one moment, if you please. Before proceeding, there is one more salient event—

BILLING More *prima donna* antics?

MAUD No, it does not feature you, sir.

GREIN But that was such a lovely segue into the arraignment. Maybe we should—

MAUD Mr. Grein, the second act will have a surplus of judiciary scenes. Ere we retire to the courtroom, I should like to linger briefly in the bedroom.

GREIN Oh my.

BILLING Typical.

MAUD The night before the arraignment, Maud Allan received a visitation from the ghost of Oscar Wilde.

BILLING Oh, for crinoline.

GREIN Oh! Oh! Oh! May I be Wilde? I do a splendid—

MAUD (*Nodding assent to Grein, who quickly changes*) It befell as follows. The encounter with my nemesis had left me nervous and distracted. Sleep was not forthcoming, so I indulged that fickle mistress with a laudanum nightcap. Shortly afterward, the room began to rotate like a dervish, and the floral decoration on the walls began to leer with demon faces. I was once more greeted with the impetus to swoon. “Either this wallpaper goes, or I do!”

She falls, but Oscar Wilde catches her. They begin to dance.

OSCAR It takes a thoroughly good woman to do a thoroughly foolish thing.

MAUD Am I good, Oscar? Mr. Billing says I am a threat to purity.

OSCAR Men who are trying to do something for the world are always insufferable.

MAUD But I’m so sick of men who love me. The ones who hate me are—

OSCAR AND MAUD So much more charming.

OSCAR My warning to you, Maud. I was destroyed by a most charming man.

MAUD Alfred Lord Douglas.

They step back and watch, as the romance of Young Oscar and Bosie is re-enacted downstage. Across the stage, Queensbury and his buddies look on disapprovingly.

OSCAR Bosie. How they talked of us. It is so monstrous, how people go about, these days, saying things behind one's back that are absolutely and entirely true.

MAUD I share your pain.

OSCAR My pain had but begun. For Bosie had a father—the Marquess of Queensbury.

QUEENSBURY Disgraceful.

OSCAR He could not abide to see his son seduced by such a handsome devil. I mean me.

QUEENSBURY There are no words to describe that—that—that—

QUEENSBUDDY 1
Beast.

QUEENSBUDDY 2
That buggerer.

QUEENSBUDDY 1
That sodomite.

QUEENSBURY Oh, that's a good one. (*Writing on a calling card*) "To Oscar Wilde, posing as a sod—som—sodom—"

QUEENSBUDDY 1
Sodomite, you ruddy twit.

QUEENSBURY Close enough.

He sends the calling card to Oscar. The players reconfigure into a trial.

OSCAR The Marquess had slipped up, or so I thought. With the pejorative in his own hand, I struck back confidently in the courts of law. I sued the father of my love for libel, and I thought, with Bosie by my side, we could not fail.

MAUD What happened, then?

OSCAR Betrayal. Tables turned. My libel charge was twisted round in court, until it was apparent that I was the one on trial. My darkest secrets, flushed out into light. My private life, grist for the public mill. I was found guilty of indecency. I was imprisoned. Bosie never spoke to me again. I was alone.

MAUD But I have always been alone. Well, nearly always ... certainly, since...

OSCAR Maud. My ill-considered legal action led me down the path of misery and shame. I died a broken man, my foes triumphant.

MAUD But your astounding works of genius shall outlast your suffering a hundred years. Nay, two! Does that not make it all worthwhile?

OSCAR Actually ... it does, now that you mention it. I thank you, Maud, from one aesthete to another. You have set me straight.

MAUD Well—

OSCAR Well, not literally straight.

They laugh. Oscar retreats into the ether.

BILLING Well that was useless.

GREIN But ART is useless. That is what we're trying to tell you. "All art is quite useless."

BILLING And you've proved your point a thousand different ways. And I applaud you.

MAUD More than just applaud. You're one of us now. You are a part of the art.

BILLING And therefore useless, I suppose?

MAUD Yes. But, at the least, you are no longer vulgar. Shall we move along?

SYRIAN The trial of SALOMÉ!

PAGE Day One: The arraignment!

Maud, Grein, Page and Syrian at one side of the stage; Billing, Spencer, Eileen, and Jane at the other.

BILLING Quickly, now. Miss Villiers-Stuart, you must summon the attention of the Press. I doubt it will be difficult.

JANE Mr. Billing—

BILLING Spencer, you forgot the law books at the office. Run and fetch them.

SPENCER You've no time to read them.

BILLING Doesn't matter. At this point, I shall content myself with the appearance of knowledge. Now go.

JANE Mr. Billing, my name is—

BILLING Ah, the Jezebel herself.

MAUD That is a separate Bible story, Mr. Billing.

BILLING Both are fallen women in need of repentance.

MAUD Repentance is quite out of date.

JANE Mr. Billing, if you please—

MAUD Besides, if a sincerely penitent young lady is to be believed, she must go to a bad dressmaker. Would you wish such horrors on me, sir?

BILLING What I would wish on you, my dear Delilah— (*Eileen has re-entered with a Newsmen*) is a life of calm reflection and serenity.

An offstage voice calls out (as Spencer returns with a stack of books):

VOICE Oyez, oyez. Civil court of London, the Honourable Mr. Justice Darling presiding.

BILLING Oh, blooming socks, not Darling.

DARLING This is a preliminary hearing in the case of Miss Maud Allan and the Independent Theatre versus *The Vigilante* newspaper.

SPENCER Jabbernow! Where have I heard Maud Allan's name before?

DARLING Where are the accusers?

GREIN Here, my lord.

DARLING And the defendant?

EILEEN Here he is! The brightest star of Britain's long, dark night!

SPENCER Maud Allan ... Canada ... Maud Allan...

BILLING My lord, as you no doubt are cognizant, I have, on past occasions, made disparaging remarks about your conduct and, indeed, your competence, as judge. And since the news of my complaints has already reached your ears, you cannot but be prejudiced against me in this case ... unless, of course, the news had NOT reached you ... until this moment, which I see from your expression is the case. How regrettable.

DARLING You penned this article about Miss Allan, sir?

BILLING Not I. My facts checker, Captain Spencer.

DARLING But you own the newspaper.

BILLING Correct. But I was out to lunch.

DARLING And you entrust the content of your paper to this Spencer fellow?

BILLING Yes, of course. I mean, he is a thumping patriot. He fought for Britain in the Boer War.

SPENCER Allan! Yes! Beefeating bastardy! Of course!

He throws the stack of books onto the floor and starts combing through them, muttering to himself.

BILLING Took a bit of shrapnel to the head, mind you...

Billing urges Eileen to try to calm Spencer down while Darling talks.

DARLING Mr. Billing, I sincerely hope you understand the gravity of your predicament. You are answerable within this court to up to three counts of libel. I mean defamatory libel, for impugning Miss Maud Allan's reputation and affiliates.

BILLING *(Distracted)* Yes.

DARLING Then provocatory libel, which is print that may incite a public outrage or disturbance of the peace.

BILLING *(Distracted)* Yes, yes.

DARLING And finally, licentious libel, for when one publishes material which may corrupt the pure and innocent at heart.

BILLING “Corrupt the pure”—I’m not the one corrupting, here.

MAUD They are your words, Mr. Billing.

DARLING Of course, licentious libel is a criminal offense.

BILLING Is it indeed? Oh my. And what would be the average sentence ... if one were to be convicted ... of that ... thing?

DARLING Imprisonment for up to nine years.

BILLING Nine...

DARLING How do you plead, Mr. Billing?

JANE Nine years! Merciful lady’s slipper!

She faints. Billing catches her.

MAUD Some ladies lack the art of swooning.

EILEEN Who the hell is this, who’s so upset about you getting your two-timing arse locked up, and may they throw away the key, to boot!

MAUD My lord, it seems that Mr. Billing’s grip on the proceedings is unstable. May we skip his brutish cross-examinations and receive the sentencing instead?

DARLING My dear, you are a spring of reason in a desert of—

SPENCER I’ve got it! Allan! William Henry Allan! I’m a ruddy crackerjack, I am!

Billing takes the book that Spencer was looking at, while Spencer does a ridiculous victory dance.

DARLING Sir, you are out of order.

MAUD (*To Grein*) Jack, I want to go.

SPENCER Who's a ruddy genius? Spencer is! Spencer!

DARLING That will do, sir! Someone please eject this lunatic from—

BILLING Miss Maud Allan. Well, well, well.

MAUD My lord, I'd like to drop the charges, please. This instant.

DARLING But you just said—

MAUD I cannot abide a scandal in my life, my lord.

BILLING She means ANOTHER scandal. Captain Spencer has directed my attention to a chapter in *Amazing Criminal Cases of Canada*. You are Canadian, Miss Allan?

MAUD Yes. But—

BILLING And your brother, William Henry Allan, he was a Canadian as well?

DARLING I fail to see how that is relevant.

BILLING (*Hands the book to the judge*) William Henry Allan, convicted, executed, 1898, upon the charge of murdering two girls.

SPENCER Ay, bonny schoolgirls. Studying to take the veil.

DARLING (*Reading*) And outraging their bodies after death!

MAUD Bravo. You have succeeded in exposing to the world the single scar I bear which will not heal.

BILLING Oh yes, a terrible ordeal, no doubt, to learn one's brother was a sadist and a necrophile. But your distress does not concern us here, today.

DARLING Then what, exactly, does?

GREIN Yes, what has this to do with anything? The libel, or the article?

DARLING "The Cult of the..."

BILLING Permit me, and I'll tell you. Yes I will. I'll tell you that Maud Allan and her brother are two perverted peas in one pernicious pod. That, like her brother, she is drawn to deeds of an impious tenor—not only the lewd dance that made her famous, but the deeds of a true Salomé. Sadism. Exhibitionism. Homosexuality.

GREIN Do you mind, sir?

BILLING I do, indeed, because whereas in private, Miss Maud Allan may commit whatever sins she fancies—

GREIN Yes, and, private—these are PRIVATE PERFORMANCES—

BILLING But in truth, her odious activities affect us all. Justice Darling, you were fishing for a plea? I'll give you one: justification. I will demonstrate, within a court of law, that Maud Allan is the apex and epitome of all that is profane and treacherous in England's frightened heart. And, yes, "The Cult of the ... Clitorites." That too.

A spot on Maud Allan. She addresses the audience.

MAUD It was just as Oscar had predicted. He had turned the trial around, and trapped me here, in court. Surrounded by men in a man's world. Why am I even here? This war is not my war, this play is scarcely even mine. I am a dancer. What can a dancer do to defend herself within a court of law? There is but one thing only: that which she has done a thousand times, in every corner of the world. That which she's born to do: entice the ears and eyes of men. And yes, when necessary, other vulnerable parts of their anatomies.

These men are desperate, furious, afraid. Their blood is hot. And sitting there, and smelling it—the blood of Englishmen—I saw the truth of things. I am not trapped in here with these men. Not a whit. I am Maud Allan, the Salomé Dancer. THEY are trapped in here with ME.

End of Act One

Act Two

The act begins with a tight, sultry spot on Maud Allan.

MAUD

The Vision of Salomé. It begins with the smallest of gestures: a flutter of lashes, like two midnight moths; or else a slight curl at the corner of the mouth, like the tail of a cat preparing to pounce. Or just a breath, but one that makes the bosom swell, and summons up a rustling of pearls as they arrange themselves beneath the seven veils.

The music begins. Persian strings, a clap of small brass cymbals, and then an oboe, waving like a wounded snake. The drums are heavy, distant thunder drawing nearer. You can see the electricity that pulses underneath the skin. It makes the fingers hum like strings upon a harp. The mouth, still poised to pounce.

And then a step. A firm and unexpected thrusting of the hips, and everything is energy at last. And how the movement of the hips is amplified and echoed by the veils! And how the limelight seems to penetrate their gauzy shield. How the belly sways and beckons—you can see the diamond cluster in the navel, winking, casting glittering come-hither glances through the room.

And then the veils begin to fall. The first: lush verdigris, a delicate and patient hand directs it from its bed of pearls and lets it sigh onto the floor. The second: marvelous vermilion, this, the veil that hides that sculpted neck, you watch as it appears and starts to sway, acquiring a secret rhythm that the hips had not detected. And it is this, this secret rhythm, that controls you, guides your eyes from veil to veil and you are helpless in the dance's thrall.

Then veil the third: the shoulders rise like twin moons. Veil the fourth: that wide, bronze valley of the flesh, where pearls and gazes nestle down to sleep in opiated trances—but the rhythm will not let you sleep. It pounds, it thrusts and bucks and surges, and the hand that plucks the fifth veil seems to tremble slightly, as if frightened of the coming culmination. Veil the sixth: a sullen turquoise, sad to be drawn from the glistening skin.

A dervish, now. The sandals spin around the veil-stained stage. The body turns so quickly now, that all you see are colours, pearls and flesh, and all you hear are drums and breath, and all rhythm, tugging, forward from your seats, you yearn to see the final veil erupt, you NEED that ending. You need something—you need

The spot has widened enough to reveal Billing, standing close, taking notes.

Do you mind, Mr. Billing?

BILLING On the contrary. I have recorded every sinful, sordid moment of your monologue, enumerating the profanities, the symptoms of degeneracy, and so forth. In combination with your contributions from the first act, you now have ... three hundred fifty-six blasphemies to your name. Congratulations, Miss Allan. You now comprise your very own black book.

MAUD Splendid! When I pass away, I pray you, publish it.

She breezes away, as the lights come up to full and the stage fills.



Maud Allen, the Salomé dancer (Leslie Caffaro), dances the Dance of the Seven Veils for the courtroom in Scott Sharplin's The Trial of Salomé, July 2007. Photo: C.W. Hill Photography for Walterdale Theatre Associates.

SYRIAN The trial of SALOMÉ!

PAGE Day Two. The trial begins!

SYRIAN *The London Times* declares:

BOWLER-HATTED BLOKE 3

“Passchendaele Lines Lost! Fighting Retreat of Allies. News From France Never Grimmer.”

DARLING No mention of the trial, what what?

BOWLER-HATTED BLOKE 3

Don't see it, mate.

DARLING Hm. Pity.

BILLING Ladies and gentlemen, the foreigner Maud Allan has accused me and my publication of attacking her with words of slanderous libel. She says that I implied she was a lewd, unchaste, immoral woman; one who gives private performances of prohibited plays, designed to foster and encourage obscene, unnatural practices in men and women. And she is right—correct in all details but one. My accusations are not of a slanderous nature—because, my lord, they are completely true.

DARLING You shall have to prove that.

BILLING I intend to. For my first witness, I call Mister Jack Grein, producer of the Independent Theatre.

GREIN My stars and garters!

MAUD Courage, Jack. For me.

GREIN For you, my flower.

DARLING Mister Grein, if you will take the stage—er, stand.

BILLING Jack Thomas Grein. Are you an Englishman?

GREIN I am.

BILLING Of British origin?

GREIN Of Dutch.

BILLING You founded several theatres in London, did you not? Including, I believe, the German Theatre.

GREIN Before the war.

BILLING Of course. And now you are producing *Salomé* by Oscar Wilde.

GREIN I am indeed.

BILLING By Wilde, the pervert.

PAGE I object.

BILLING But Wilde was a convicted sodomite. His perversion is a matter of law.

GREIN I never had the privilege of meeting Mister Wilde, or seeing him in action, as it were.

BILLING But now you are familiar with his writing, are you not? Describe his play.

GREIN It is a masterpiece.

BILLING Of perversion?

SYRIAN I object!

GREIN I have never found it perverse, myself.

BILLING Are you aware that *Salomé* has been forbidden by the British Censor?

GREIN Not for perversion. It contains Biblical scenes, which are forbidden on the public stage.

SYRIAN Hence Mister Grein's decision to hold PRIVATE spectacles.

GREIN Indeed.

BILLING On page twenty-seven, Salomé says, "I desire thy mouth, Iokanaan. It is redder than a pomegranate cut with an ivory knife."

GREIN Ah, beautiful.

BILLING How old is Salomé?

GREIN She is a child, awakening to womanhood.

BILLING And this desire for John the Baptist's mouth, does not read like an awakening of lust?

SYRIAN Oh, I object.

PAGE No, no, it's my turn.

GREIN It is but the spring song of the soul. It is a spiritual lust.

BILLING And when she dances for the head of John the Baptist? When she dances to appease the lust of Herod? Is that spiritual?

GREIN That's more an act of spite.

BILLING I thought you said her soul was waking up.

MAUD In women, the awakening of spirit goes often hand in hand with spite.

DARLING I see where this is headed, Mister Billing. You wish to demonstrate that this play, *Salomé*, is unacceptable. Well, I have read the play, and I confess I found it much to my distaste, for there is no representation of a calm domestic life. Nobody slaps anybody else on the back all through the play. And there is not a single reference to roast beef from one end of the dialogue to the other.

GREIN Roast ... beef?

DARLING And though there are some passing references to Christianity, there are no muscular Christians, as it were. The fact is, if the court will permit a judge his own opinion, I found it tedious beyond all reason.

MAUD Oh, but my Lord, there is a vast divide between the reading of a thing, and its enactment.

BILLING There she has my point exactly. We must all of us engage with our imaginings to bring this scandal out into the light.

GREIN But it is poetry.

BILLING Page seventy-eight. "A huge black arm comes forth, bearing on a silver shield the head of Iokanaan." Salomé speaks. "Ah! Thou wouldst not suffer me to—"

DARLING Let her read.

BILLING I beg your pardon?

DARLING Let Miss Allan read. That we may better picture it.

BILLING Ah. Quite. Miss Allan, if you please?

MAUD "Ah! Thou wouldst not suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan. Well, I will kiss it now. I will bite it with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit."

BILLING That's fine. Now, Mister Grein, do you know what a sadist is?

GREIN I do not believe so.

BILLING It refers, sir, to the vice as revealed here, in the text of *Salomé*, the lust of a child for the part of a dead body.

PAGE I object to such outrageous—

BILLING It refers—

SYRIAN And in the presence of a lady!

BILLING It refers to one who would derive arousal from the biting of a dead man's lip.

PAGE My Lord, please stop him! He will make Miss Allan swoon!

BILLING Can you deny, Jack Grein, that this play panders to the vicious lusts of moral perverts? That *Salomé* is not an innocent, but a sadistic necrophile?

GREIN It's poetry, I tell you. It can do no harm.

BILLING Oh, then it is to England's benefit that we receive such spectacles in wartime?

GREIN War and art have no relation whatsoever.

BILLING Does this play assist us to resolve the tribulations which all Britons face today?

GREIN It helps us to find solace in beautiful language.

BILLING Solace? To the families of the three million men in France?

GREIN (*Dissolving into tears*) "True art is neither moral nor immoral" ... and, and "all art is quite useless" ... and "vice and virtue ... materials ... in equal measure..."

MAUD My lord? Perhaps a recess?

DARLING Hmm? Oh yes. Adjourned. And very fine, Miss Allan. Your delivery, I mean.

The trial breaks apart. Maud and Billing breeze past each other.

BILLING Your delivery will not sustain you long, in court.

MAUD All the world's my stage, Mr. Billing, for as long as men have eyes and ears.

She exits. Billing is left alone onstage.

BILLING Damn and blast her eyes and ears. And Shakespeare! The audacity—a Canadian quotes Shakespeare. But she's right, by Isaac. I played every card exactly right back there, and still the judge's eyes were stuck to her like glue. There must be something. (*As he rants, Jane Smuts enters behind him. She tries to speak.*) Make her say the wrong thing, that's the job! And then he'll see the demon underneath the damsel. But I tried already—threw her dead, demented brother in her face, and did she even blanch? Well, yes, a bit of blanch, but not enough. It's bloody odd. Most women turn to jelly when I'm in the room. Can barely form a sentence. But now I'm faced with this, this wretched WHORE— (*He turns and sees Jane, mouth open.*) Oh! Uh ... I ABHOR Maud Allan. Was my meaning.

JANE It's all right, sir. One can say "whore." It's in the Bible.

BILLING Is it?

JANE Yes. The Whore of Babylon. (*She happens to step forward with her hand out at that moment.*) Oh! Not me, of course. She's the Whore. I'm merely—

BILLING Quite.

JANE Jane Smuts. A most devoted fan of yours.

BILLING You are the swooner from the other day.

JANE And also, she who brought the article about Miss Allan to your office.

BILLING So I've you to thank for all this ... business.

JANE Yes. She truly is the Whore of Babylon, you know. It's no exaggeration.

BILLING Quite. Well, thanks for popping by, and all.

JANE I think her coming is a sign, don't you?

BILLING (*Pacing again. To himself*) If I could call somebody to the stand. Someone to really shake her up.

JANE It's like this war.

BILLING The war, yes. Good idea.

JANE Everything's been written. And foreseen.

BILLING A more political approach would catch her napping. Find the moral ground.

JANE You've seen them, haven't you? The Signs of the Apocalypse? My church says that you've seen them.

BILLING No, the best approach is still the medical. It makes her seem unclean.

JANE The Second Christ is nigh. But if He is to rise again, He first requires a vessel, Mr. Billing.

BILLING Sorry, who requires what again?

JANE The Christ. He urgently desires to be born.

BILLING Which church did you say...?

JANE We are called the Sisters of the Unsubstantiated Assumption. We believe the Christ will come to us in flesh, born unto a Prophet and a Virgin.

BILLING Heh. A Prophet, eh?

JANE OH YES.

BILLING And ... a virgin?

JANE Yes, Mr. Billing.

Pause.

BILLING All right, fun is fun. Where are they?

JANE Where are what?

BILLING The photo men. Jig's up, laddies. Come on out, now.

JANE This is not a joke.

BILLING A frame-up, then. In moments, you'll be crawling all over me—

JANE Heavens to bluebells! Well, I didn't mean to rush things, but—

BILLING And then it's flashbulbs and blackmail all the way to Germany.

JANE No, Mr. Billing. This is not a trick. The Sisters have selected you. You are to be the sire of the new Christ.

BILLING This is simply too absurd to be a ruse.

JANE The congress must be soon. And if your trial goes poorly, you may face imprisonment, a long and solitary term.

BILLING In the service of morality, one must endure great hardships.

JANE If we were to conjugate, your child could raise the holy torch up in your absence.

BILLING Conjugate ... now that is not found in the Bible, Miss Smuts.

JANE Beget. Have knowledge. Lie together, as the lion and the lamb.

BILLING Miss Allan ... er, Miss Smuts, I mean ... I can't. I must stand firm. I need my stamina. This trial. I feel the war now hinges on its outcome. Ludicrous, I know, but ... then there's you.

JANE You do not wish to be the father of the Christ?

BILLING Perhaps another time.

JANE The sisters will be so dismayed.

BILLING Please pass on my condolences.

JANE We'll have to choose another Prophet. You really were the best of all the candidates.

BILLING Go on.

JANE Clearly, fitted with the best physique. I mean, Queen Anne's lace, but for a lady to resist all THAT, she'd have to be—

BILLING (*Mutters*) Maud Allan.

JANE —Blind.

BILLING Or blind to men. That's it! (*Kisses Jane on the lips.*) You've found her weakness! I'd forgotten, that's what got this business started in the first place.

JANE Do you mean ... the cult?

BILLING Exactly. Blind to men. Because they lack the proper apparati. Whereas a woman...

Eileen Villiers-Stuart has returned to the stage. Billing turns to her.

EILEEN Absolutely not.

Scene change: The stage fills up again.

PAGE Day Three!

SYRIAN *The Daily Chronicle.*

BOWLER-HATTED BLOKE 4

"Germans Reach the River Marne. The Bosche is Dug in Deep."

DARLING And is there—?

BOWLER-HATTED BLOKE 4

Page Two. "Scandalous Trial Afoot in London Court! MP Billing Levels Shocking Accusations at the Independent Theatre."

BILLING No photo, though.

DARLING Oh! Oh! Miss Allan! In light of what you said, I have endeavoured to re-read the play.

MAUD How studious.

DARLING And yet I still cannot exactly picture it, as such. The stage directions leave so much to be desired.

MAUD I am sensing something of desire.

DARLING I thought, perhaps, if I were able to, well, see you. In performance.

MAUD I'm sure that Mr. Grein will offer you a ticket to the play, when it resumes.

DARLING I—yes, well. Generous. And yet. I thought—a private sort of—thing?

MAUD My lord. When I was in my prime, I performed in all the grandest halls of Europe, and before the courts of Kings and Queens. And yet, each time I danced the famous Dance of Salomé, I danced in private.

She goes to sit down.

DARLING Remarkable lady.

BILLING My lord, I call unto the stand one Doctor Serrell Cooke.

SYRIAN I object!

PAGE We haven't even started yet.

BILLING My lord, he is an expert witness, and a specialist in sexual disorders.

DARLING More of that unpleasantness, what what?

BILLING 'Fraid so, my lord.

DARLING Be very careful, Mr. Billing. There are ladies present, and I would not have their winsome sensibilities dismayed.

BILLING (*Scans the courtroom*) Oh, if you mean Miss Allan? Not to worry. (*To Cooke*) Doctor Cooke, please describe your qualifications for the court.

COOKE Well, my speciality is nose-and-throat, in fact. I do enjoy an article on sexual perversion now and then. Who doesn't?

BILLING And who pens these articles?

COOKE Uh, Reinhold Bloch. Sacher Masoch. Krafft and Ebing.

BILLING Germans, mostly?

COOKE Now you come to mention it...

BILLING But sexual perversion does exist in England too?

COOKE Oh yes. In greater numbers every day. Or so I've read. Uranians, fetishists, satyriasisists.

BILLING And what distinguishes all these sub-categories?

COOKE Well, various ... that is, in many cases ... I can't precisely say.

BILLING So, in your medical opinion, then, all perverts are the same.

COOKE Well—

BILLING One who is a sadist, for example—that is, one who would derive arousal from the biting of a dead man's lip—that one might ALSO be a homosexual?

COOKE It's possible, of course. Well, yes. Yes, certainly.

BILLING Or if it is a WOMAN who is biting?

COOKE Ah, we doctors call those lesbians.

DARLING From Lesbos? As in, Greece?

BILLING No, no. From Germany. Yes, Doctor?

COOKE I ... don't...

BILLING You said these vices all originate in Germany.

COOKE I did?

BILLING I think you did.

COOKE Well. German. Yes. Of course.

BILLING Or possibly Canadian?

MAUD (*To Page and Syrian*) Gentlemen?

PAGE AND SYRIAN
 Objection!

MAUD Thank you.

BILLING Doctor Cooke is fully qualified to offer his opinions.

MAUD Biting the lip of the severed head is a directive in the play. You are confusing art with life.

DARLING Well put, Miss Allan. Jolly good.

BILLING Very well, then. Doctor? What breed of actress do you think might be disposed to take the role of Salomé in this, this PLAY by Oscar Wilde?

COOKE I rather think that is beyond my purview, sir.

BILLING But speculate. What does it tell us of her character?

COOKE That she is ... drawn to perverts.

BILLING And to acts of a perverted sort?

COOKE I ... yes...

BILLING And therefore?

COOKE Possibly a pervert. Probably.

DARLING Hold a moment there. You've gone too far. I can see this amiable lady with my own two eyes. She clearly is no pervert.

BILLING Ah, but these are hidden things, correct?

COOKE Well, yes, primarily—

BILLING The unseen enemy among us.

COOKE In many cases, so I've read, it's generally what's underneath that counts.

DARLING What? Underneath? What do you mean?

COOKE Well, in considering a, a female, um, that is ... one would examine, first and foremost, her ... (*He makes an "under the skirts" gesture.*)

DARLING D'you mean her knickers?

COOKE No. Beneath those.

DARLING Her ... her frillies?

COOKE Further still, my lord.

DARLING Further still than frillies? What could possibly be ... blimey!

COOKE Yes. The medical key to assessing the sexual degeneracy of females is the cli-toris.

DARLING The ... the cl—

COOKE Cli-toris. A superficial part of the female organ. The sensations which arise from this improper region are allurements which do not in any way assist the race.

BILLING And the indications of degeneracy in this unpleasant area?

COOKE I've never, actually, myself, seen—

BILLING Speculate.

COOKE Well, then, enlarged. Engorged with blood. Erect.

GREIN My lord, I beg your intervention.

DARLING Yes, this really is, um, rather—

BILLING Ladies in the thrall of this...

COOKE Cli-toris.

BILLING How do they behave, exactly? Speculate.

COOKE Insatiable. Nympho-maniacal. Why, an exaggerated cli-toris might even drive a woman to an elephant.

A great hubbub in court.

MAUD I believe you are exaggerating rather more than the cli-toris.

DARLING This—I'm finding all this talk a little—surely, um, Miss Allan, you must be—

MAUD Apart from having to restrain my mirth, my lord, I am in no distress.

BILLING You find this funny, then?

MAUD Unlike you gentlemen, who seem alarmed by your discovery, I learned about this superficial organ quite some time ago.

BILLING How interesting! For, as Doctor Cooke here will inform you, those who know about the cli-toris are either medical experts or manifest perverts. Which are you, Miss Allan?

MAUD An enlightened female, sir.

BILLING I rest my case.

DARLING Then may we please close the book upon the cli-toris?

BILLING Another question, Doctor. Do you think the reading of perverted literature provokes perverted acts?

COOKE I s'pose it might be very common, yes.

BILLING And what about the viewing of perverted plays? Would watching one provoke excitement?

COOKE Well yes, that's interesting. Might be how those cli-torises get engorged to start with.

BILLING So, normal gentlemen and ladies, watching plays replete with sadism and dancing, and it makes them, what? Aroused?

COOKE Yes.

BILLING Perverts? Members of the cult?

COOKE Yes, dancing I should think, would be especially infectious.

BILLING Dancing. Like the Dance of Salomé.

COOKE Yes, yes. A very interesting theory, Mister Billing. If vibrations travel through the air—

DARLING Let's see it.

BILLING What?

MAUD My lord?

DARLING The dance. The one that Salomé performs, the Seven Veils.

BILLING You ... want Miss Allan to perform her dance, in court?

DARLING Exactly. Well, as evidence, you see. The doctor, here—I mean, if watching perverts dance makes one a pervert, then—

MAUD My lord.

DARLING Let's cut the chatter, do the dance, and then we'll see what's what, what what?

MAUD My lord, although your invitation is appealing, I must respectfully decline.

BILLING And what, exactly, do you fear, Miss Allan?

MAUD This is not a fitting venue.

BILLING That you'll turn us all to deviants?

MAUD The light is wrong. And I am not warmed up.

DARLING If you are pure, as you maintain yourself to be, what is the fear?

GREIN *(Whispering to Maud)* This may be our way out of this.

DARLING A harmless dance. A dalliance.

GREIN Just do it. And when nothing happens—nothing untoward—

DARLING Miss Allan, dance for me. I order you.

MAUD My lord. To ask a lady once to dance, that is the privilege of all gentlemen. To ask repeatedly, and once she has declined? Some may perceive that as a great dishonour.

SYRIAN A dishonour? Here I come!

PAGE Now hang a jif, I heard it first!

Everyone's lines begin to overlap, as the trial dissolves into bedlam.

DARLING Now, order! I, I will have order!

SYRIAN You have ruffled the feathers of this rare bird.

PAGE You have spat in the eye of Miss Manners, and she's cross as hell!

COOKE May I step down?

BILLING Your honour—

DARLING Order! Order is in order!

SYRIAN That was a ghastly declaration.

PAGE Oh, and yours was better?

SYRIAN Here we go, then!

DARLING Order!

Page and Syrian start in with the fisticuffs again.

BILLING My lord, it seems that we shall have to take a recess.

DARLING Yes, well ... bloody hell, then. Court adjourned!

Darling hurries off. The rest of the court also breaks apart. Maud pauses to separate Page and Syrian, to pat them both on the cheeks and send them off.

GREIN Now the judge will be against us.

MAUD Yes.

GREIN If you had simply gone along with it, the truth—

MAUD The truth, Jack ... is rarely pure, and never simple.

They exit. New scene: Billing, Eileen, Spencer, and Jane. Spencer talks to Billing, who mostly talks to Eileen.

SPENCER The time is right, I'm telling ye.

BILLING You must.

EILEEN Don't even ask.

BILLING You know I'd never ask you to do something—

EILEEN Yes you would.

SPENCER I'm ready as a rock. Just put me up there, and ye'll see.

BILLING But it may be the only way to get to her.

EILEEN Forget it, Roger.

SPENCER Judges love me. Always have.

BILLING It's like Miss Smuts here said.

JANE (*Reading from news clippings*) "Miss Allan, often rumoured to prefer the company of ladies—"

BILLING There. You see?

EILEEN Then send her. She's a lady.

JANE Oleander!

SPENCER AND I'm photogenic.

BILLING She's not up to it. She frightens easily.

EILEEN That's not what I heard.

BILLING And anyway, if you were Maud, which one would you pick? Her, or you?

SPENCER It's time somebody stumped up on the state of things. The ruddy scheme.

BILLING She's weak. She's vulnerable. The time is right.

EILEEN I do not do such things.

BILLING You do. You did. To me.

JANE She did?

BILLING She tried to. I resisted.

EILEEN But it's different with a lady.

JANE I think she should do it.

SPENCER (*Practicing*) “Ay, my lord. The intestinal parasites of Europe are among us.”

BILLING Spencer, shut your gob. I am not putting you upon the stand.

SPENCER Pumpship! Skivvy-bin! Why not, then, eh?

JANE (*Reading*) “When not in court, Miss Allan is reclusive. A pariah in this country.”

BILLING Go to her. Befriend her. That is all I ask.

EILEEN “Befriend her.” Has the age of euphemisms not yet passed?

BILLING Perhaps, in her anxiety, she’ll slip you some incriminating facts.

EILEEN When I vowed love to you, I did not figure it would lead to some colonial dance-trollop trying to slip me things—

JANE “Often, after sessions, she is seen to promenade alone along the Serpentine.”

BILLING For me. For all we’ve fought for. And for England.

SPENCER God, His Majesty, and Country, SIR!

EILEEN I’ll do it, then. But only if you put him on the stand.

BILLING What? Why—

EILEEN Because. If you are going to make me squirm, I will ensure you do the same.

Scene change: Billing preps Spencer for the stand.

PAGE Day Four!

SYRIAN All papers! Take your pick! You’ll see the same words!

BOWLER-HATTED BLOKE 3
“Scandal!”

PAGE “Allegations! Accusations!”

SYRIAN “Extraordinary Scenes and Outrageous Euphemisms!”

BILLING Try to keep your head, and tongue, about you.

PAGE “Perverse Anatomical Secrets Revealed!”

BILLING Say only what we have rehearsed. About the Black Book—

SPENCER Who told you about the Black Book?

BILLING My career is flashing before my eyes.

DARLING Mr. Billing, call your next witness.

BILLING Captain Harold Spencer, Special Forces, Special Discharge.

SPENCER Your eminence, it is a great, great honour—

BILLING Captain Spencer. Will you kindly and directly tell the court what post you held before your discharge?

SPENCER Secret Service. Ultra-Secret Section, Number two-six-seven-S. The S, for Secret.

BILLING And your mission, as of last November, 1917?

SPENCER I was assigned to infiltrate the German conspiracy that ravages our shores.

Hubbub and hullabaloo.

DARLING Order! Order!

PAGE My lord, I fail to see what bearing this might have upon the case.

BILLING Then you are blinkered, sir. Thus far, we have been altogether focused on the offending headline, “The Cult of the Clitorites.” But let us now recall the full text of the article beneath. “If the belly-shaking scugs at Scotland Yard had the ... presence of mind ... to confiscate this list of members, they’d be looking at a hefty chunk of names from out the Huns’ Black Book itself!”

SPENCER The Black Book! I have seen it with my own two ears!

BILLING Will you explain its purpose, Captain?

SPENCER Doctor.

BILLING CAPTAIN.

SPENCER Right. The Black Book. That's where Jerry keeps the names of all the ruddy Britishers that he's got wrapped around his filthy digit.

BILLING British men and women that the Bosche can blackmail. Why?

SPENCER Because they're deviates that should be locked away!

BILLING And what does Germany intend, with all these deviates?

SPENCER Subversion. Treason. Insurrection. Every man and woman on the Isle eating ruddy sauerkraut by Christmas.

SYRIAN I object!

DARLING To what?

SYRIAN I ... do not like sauerkraut.

PAGE And, plus, this witness is a braying loony.

DARLING You shall have to prove that, counsel.

SPENCER (*Under his breath*) Pebbledash! Poopnoddy!

PAGE Would the Captain please inform us where he learned of this Black Book?

SPENCER 'Twas in the words of Kaiser Wilhelm himself.

SYRIAN In Germany, then?

BILLING No, no. The Captain has not been to Germany.

PAGE The Kaiser came to him, then? To his house?

SPENCER Who told ye that? Ya ruddy—

BILLING I believe, in his capacity as Ultra-Secret Secret Servicer, the Captain has been able to construct a history of this most volatile tome.

SPENCER I have?

BILLING (*Under his breath*) You've always been a fan of rampant speculation, Spencer. Why stop now?

SPENCER I have. The Black Book has a convoluted past—

BILLING But highly relevant.

During Spencer's next speech, the other actors scramble to enact vignettes which illustrate the various stages of the Book's history. Only Maud does not participate in this.

SPENCER —Which started in the shameful year of eighteen hundred forty-seven, when Ludwig of Bavaria was King. Disgusting and debaucherous, the bastard took a mistress, in the form of Lola Montez, the Irish-Spanish “Spider Dancer.” Jezebel with dahlias. She taught him how arachnids fornicate; he made her Countess of Landsfeld. The Bavarians revolted! Lola fled the country, and the King was made to sign a dastardly confession, listing all the aberrant aristocrats they'd dallied with. And then he was defenestrated!

But the book survived, and, smuggled through the hands of simple peasants, settled in St. Petersburg. It fell into the hands of sexually obsessive siren Antonina Milikova, who employed the dreadful testimony as imaginative fodder for her lustful thoughts. She shared it with her music teacher, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, then attempted to seduce him. But the man was an horrendous homosexual, despite involvement with no fewer than three women. Scorned and horny, Milikova entered all the names of the composer's lovers, man and woman both. Tchaikovsky was disgraced! Attempted suicide by standing in a freezing river, praying for pneumonia.

And then! The Russian Revolution! All the traitors and conspirators set down by servants of the Tsar. This web of lechery converged upon the name of one whose sexual charisma gathered all of Russia in its grasp: the Mad Monk of the Muskovites, Grigory Rasputin. Impervious to blackmail, Rasputin was assaulted by assassins: poisoned, stabbed, and shot. As he collapsed, he reached for what he took to be a Bible—but which was, in fact, none other than the same Black Book which brought his evil down!

From thence, the Book passed through the hands of infamous and vile personalities. Isadora Duncan used it as an address book. And Mata

Hari—yes, another dancer, and a spy—she used its pages to enlarge her bosom. Robert Falcon Scott bore that Black Book with him to the Antartics. Charlie Chaplin accidentally autographed it at the opening of *Dough and Dynamite*. The Archduke Ferdinand was said to thumb its pages just before the shot heard 'round the world. And now, most recently, where has the Book been sighted? In whose terrible and treacherous possession?

BILLING *(Gesturing to Maud)* Tell us! Tell us!

SPENCER There's the culprit! Miss Maud Allan! Prob'ly got it with her at this very moment.

MAUD Nonsense.

DARLING Then, Miss Allan, you'll have no objection to distributing the contents of your carryall?

MAUD A lady's purse, my lord, is sacred ground.

SPENCER Ay, so is England, hussy!

DARLING If you please, Miss Allan?

Maud begins to remove items from her purse. The tension mounts, as she removes a series of increasingly suggestive items. After four or five items, out comes a large black book.

SPENCER Ah ha!

BILLING I don't believe it.

DARLING We must see that book, Miss Allan.

MAUD I would rather not.

SPENCER The safety of our nation and the outcome of this war—

DARLING Miss Allan? *(Maud hands the book to Syrian, who hands it to Page, who hands it to Darling. He reads)* "London has never seen such graceful and artistic dancing. It is of a magical beauty; but the magic is black and the beauty is baleful and insidious." *(He flips through the book. News clippings and photos tumble out.)*

MAUD You have revealed my greatest failing, gentlemen. The sin of pride. Though if you truly think the contents of my scrapbook will affect the outcome of the war ... perhaps my pride is justified? Would you say so, Mister Billing?

BILLING This proves nothing.

MAUD I heartily agree.

DARLING I shall have to, uh, retain this. For, for evidence. Especially these photos.

MAUD Naturally.

DARLING Adjourned! I shall be in chambers, not to be disturbed!

The court breaks apart.

GREIN Well, that was abject nonsense.

MAUD Not fortuitous for us, I fear.

GREIN But surely no one could believe all that conspiratory claptrap.

MAUD It is wartime, Mr. Grein. Anxiety is palpable. And a conspiracy is rather like a dance: it is not concerned with facts, but only feelings.

Scene change: Maud walks through Hyde Park, carrying a parasol. Eileen approaches her cautiously.

MAUD *(Singing to herself)*

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude.
Thy tooth is not so keen
Because thou art not seen,
Although thy breath be rude.
Heigh ho, sing heigh ho, unto the green holly!
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly;
Then heigh ho, the holly,
This life is most jolly.

EILEEN Is there no end to your talents, Miss Allan?

MAUD You have found it, I'm afraid. If I had known I had an audience, I should not have sung.

EILEEN I'd rather you continued, and will therefore leave you.

MAUD No. As someone cleverer than I once said, if one hears bad music, it becomes one's duty to drown it in conversation.

EILEEN I shall stay, then.

MAUD Splendid. Miss Maud Allan.

EILEEN Yes, I know. Miss Villiers-Stuart. You may call me Eileen.

MAUD I believe I saw you striking Mr. Billing recently.

EILEEN Ah. Well ... that was regrettable.

MAUD Oh? I'd thought to thank you for it.

EILEEN No, I mean associating with him to begin with. The striking part was rather fun.

MAUD I'll have to try it out sometime.

EILEEN Shall we sit?

MAUD After you.

They sit on a park bench.

EILEEN You must grow weary of celebrity. Besieged in public by your fans and your detractors.

MAUD Which are you, Eileen?

EILEEN A fan, of course.

MAUD And are you planning to besiege me?

EILEEN I—I—

MAUD For my defences are quite spent, I fear.

EILEEN Miss Allan, I would never dream of—

MAUD Goodness, no, whatever you do, don't dream. I'm sure you know what someone said of dreamers. Society may pardon criminals, but forgive a dreamer? Never.

EILEEN Yet I do suspect that you are one, yourself.

MAUD One what, Eileen?

EILEEN A dreamer.

MAUD Yes. Perhaps I am.

EILEEN What do you dream about?

Pause. When Maud describes her dream, it is recreated on the stage.

MAUD My brother. In the dream he finds me, firstly like a lover, but then sternly, like a judge. His head is covered by the execution hood; he has no face. Then music. We begin to dance. And then he steps away. I dance alone. He shows me something, on a silver charger. It's the head of John the Baptist—the old prop head from my Vision days. But now the face is his, and now it speaks.

THE SEVERED HEAD

Keep dancing, Maud. You must keep dancing.

MAUD And the music grows more fervent and I start to lose my breath, but still his voice is echoing, like drums, inside my head.

THE SEVERED HEAD

Keep dancing.

MAUD And I realize with horror that he means to make me dance forever. Trapped. A whirling, churning, dizzy world for all eternity. And then I wake.

EILEEN Doctor Freud believes that dreams are symbols for our deep desires. Perhaps you want to dance forever.

MAUD Yes, perhaps. And what do you dream of, Eileen?

EILEEN Your face.

MAUD I see. Any feature in particular?

EILEEN Your lips. Like grapes. That one might bite.

They are, of course, very close to kissing. Behind them, Billing and Jane rise up from the bushes with a camera. Eileen sees this and shifts away on the bench.



Maud Allen, the Salomé dancer (Leslie Caffaro), engages in a lurid kiss with Eileen Villiers-Stuart (Kelsie Acton) as Roger Pemberton-Billing (Denny Demeria) and Jane Smuts (Carolyn Barker) get their "evidence", July 2007. Photo: C.W. Hill Photography for Walterdale Theatre Associates.

MAUD Not hungry, then?

EILEEN Someone might see us. Take advantage—

MAUD I do not fear being taken advantage of. Do you?

EILEEN It's just that—now, and with the trial at such a stage—

MAUD You speak to someone who has danced to scandal's rhythm many times. Come here, Eileen. I'll tell you something secret. I don't bite. (*Eileen shifts closer again*) When I returned to England for this play, my aim was immortality. By appropriating some small measure of the fame of Mr. Wilde, I thought I could achieve it. But then the trial, its endless intermingling of Maud and Salomé, Salomé and Maud ... and what's the point of immortality if you are not allowed to be yourself?

EILEEN I see.

MAUD We must therefore be ourselves, Miss Villiers-Stuart. No matter what the cost. Can you endure that fate?

EILEEN I—I— (*Once again, they are almost kissing. But Eileen pulls back, rising this time*) I must resist. My secret, Maud, is this. I am *agent provocateur*. World-class. Adept at seeming anything but what I truly am. In fact, for so long now, I have not been ... myself ... I fear to do so would destroy me utterly. Forgive me.

She flees. Maud rises. Her gaze follows Eileen—away from Billing—yet she speaks to him, as if she'd known about his presence all along.

MAUD Do you care to give the little one a try, as well? Or shall we call it a day?

Billing looks at Jane (the “little one”) and seriously considers it. Jane sees what he’s thinking and runs off the other way. Then Maud and Billing gaze across at one another for a beat.

You are out of pawns, Mr. Billing.

BILLING I don’t need to catch you *in flagrante* anyhow. (*He snaps her photograph*) Your face alone bespeaks how hideous you are.

Scene change.

SYRIAN Day Five!

TOMMY 2 Dispatch from Paris. Writing now, before breakfast, I find it difficult to realize there is a possibility, perhaps a likelihood, of France falling utterly unto the Hun. Does anyone in England hear our tragic calls for help? Will no one answer?

SYRIAN *The London Times.*

BOWLER-HATTED BLOKE 3
 “TRIAL OF THE CENTURY!”

BOWLER-HATTED BLOKE 4
 “Pemberton-Billing Grills Secret Servicer About Germanic Book of Perverts!”

BOWLER-HATTED BLOKE 3
 “Never has England seen such Scandals!”

BOTH BLOKES

“What Will Billing Drag Out Next?”

SYRIAN My lord, by now, a child could see what this man is playing at. The article was calculated to incur a libel, and to breach the peace. And naturally, he couldn't merely plead “Not Guilty,” no—for that would not have given him the soapbox he required. Now if he honestly believes in some weird German scheme, then let him undertake his campaign howsoever he sees fit. But do not let him march to victory upon the knickers of this lady's reputation!

DARLING Did you say “knickers”?

SYRIAN I ... my lord, I think I need a recess.

DARLING But we've barely started.

BILLING Fear not, my lord. I shall put counsel's fears to rest with my last witness.

GREIN More dancing ponies, Mr. Billing?

BILLING A dancing Canadian. Ladies and gentlemen, I call Maud Allan to the stand.

MAUD Perhaps, to save the court some time, I should declare right out that I know nothing of a secret German plot, nor of a Black Book containing fifty thousand names.

BILLING The court appreciates your candour, but we cannot ... Did you say “fifty thousand names”? I never—that is—where did you—? That wasn't in the article.

DARLING You must ask the witness proper questions, Mr. Billing.

BILLING Very nice. You mean to ruffle me. Well, two can play. Miss Allan, can you tell us where you trained to be a dancer?

MAUD In America.

BILLING And elsewhere?

MAUD Yes. In Germany.

BILLING And so, Miss Allan, this performance that has made you famous—what's it called?

MAUD The Vision of Salomé.

BILLING It is a German art, then?

MAUD No. It is an art which any man with eyes may comprehend.

BILLING And what is it, Miss Salomé, which motivates this dance?

MAUD Miss Allan, if you please.

BILLING I'm sorry?

MAUD You just called me Salomé. My name—

BILLING Forgive me, yes, of course. Your CHARACTER is Salomé. But why does Salomé—I mean your character—perform her dance?

MAUD She dances for the head of John the Baptist.

BILLING Dances, so she may, what, kiss it? Bite it?

DARLING We've been over this before.

MAUD She simply needs it.

BILLING John the Baptist scorned her. Called her harlot. Child of Sodom. Whore. He was the one man she could not possess with looks alone.

MAUD Perhaps.

BILLING So she possesses him through death. Is that not so, Miss Salomé?

MAUD I am not Salomé.

BILLING Then why does Miss Maud Allan dance?

MAUD She—why—?

BILLING If you and Salomé are not the same, then surely you must have a separate motivation.

MAUD I dance because the muse invites me.

BILLING No. You dance because of men who hate you. Men—and women, yes—that you cannot control.

PAGE My lord, I must object.

BILLING And when you dance, what happens to them, Salomé?

MAUD I couldn't say.

BILLING But why did you decline to dance for us in court the other day? What was your fear?

DARLING She did seem frightened.

BILLING If you dance for art, then all is well. But if you dance for lust, or out of anger, or revenge for all the power you do not possess—

MAUD You really think I'm powerless?

BILLING (*Quietly*) Miss Allan, you're a single woman. It is 1918. What d'you think will happen if you prove that you have power? (*Aloud*) Let's review. The play is *Salomé* by Oscar Wilde, the sodomite. The character is a sadistic girl with anatomical embellishments. The plot to overthrow Great Britain, masterminded by the Germans, hinges on the deviants, degenerates, and perverts who pollute our streets. And where, in all of this, is Miss Maud Allan? Is she a helpless dove among the kites? Or is she *Salomé*?

MAUD I never met a sadist in my life, sir, till the day I met you.

BILLING What about your brother, William?

MAUD Mr. Billing. Let us not return there.

BILLING There are many forms of sadism which are, in fact, hereditary. And are you not your brother's sister?

MAUD I must ask you, in all decency, to stop.

BILLING Are not the violent lusts which led to his transgressions also circulate within your blood?

MAUD I am not *Salomé*.

BILLING But it's the role you chose, my dear. Your whole career—

MAUD I urge you, sir—

BILLING By dancing for the death of John the Baptist, and by biting, after death—

MAUD I, I implore you.

BILLING The same sin your brother once committed! He, at least, was punished.

MAUD I am warning you.

BILLING Oh. Warning? Well.

DARLING Miss Allan, I will tolerate no threats within my courtroom.

What do you intend to do? What power do you have?

Maud stands.

MAUD My lord, I would approach the bench. (*She does so. Speaking very low*)
You wish me to dance?

DARLING I, do I—? Well, I thought, when I suggested—

MAUD Yes or no, Judge. Now or never.

DARLING Yes. God, yes. You must.

MAUD What will you do for me?

DARLING Whatever. Anything you ask.

MAUD I want the case.

DARLING What?

MAUD In my favour. I want him to be found guilty.

DARLING But—

MAUD I want the head of Roger Billing on a bloody platter.

DARLING Yes, but—

MAUD Anything, you said.

DARLING Yes. Anything. All right, then.

MAUD Do you swear it, Judge?

DARLING I swear it, Salomé.

MAUD Bring me my perfumes, and the seven veils.

SYRIAN She is going to dance!

*Maud steps behind a screen to change back into her Salomé costume.
Commotion downstage as people place themselves.*

PAGE Look at the moon!

SYRIAN She is a gale that sweeps all branches clean!

PAGE The moon is turning red!

SYRIAN She is a gilded tiger in the wild!

PAGE The stars are falling from the trees like unripe figs!

SYRIAN She is a force of nature!

PAGE All the world beyond this room has tumbled into darkness!

SYRIAN She's a maelstrom!

PAGE And all that's left is—

SYRIAN She's a vortex!

PAGE That which is reflected in—

SYRIAN She's everything!

PAGE Her eyes!

BILLING *(To the audience)* And so, Miss Allan danced. And we shall spare you that irreverent event, and move directly to the verdict of the trial.

Page and Syrian grab Billing's arms.

Do you mind?

They haul him upstage.

DARLING Why dost thou tarry, Salomé?

MAUD I am prepared.

BILLING Wait! Stop! You cannot dance. The order of the court forbids it.

GREIN It forbids the play of *Salomé*. But we present the trial.

DARLING I can wait no longer!

GREIN As it happened. Every factual event.

BILLING But not the dance! Not after what befell in court.

GREIN The truth, you said. In all its grim veracity.

BILLING The truth. The words, the facts. But not this!

DARLING Dance, my Salomé! Dance for me!

Maud moves downstage, preparing to dance. Music begins.

BILLING *(To the audience)* You must not look at her. Avert your eyes, I beg of you. Her power—do not look at her!

Page and Syrian cover Billing's mouth. Maud Allan dances the Dance of the Seven Veils. When she is done, everyone onstage (including Billing) is transfixed in silent ecstasy.

MAUD *(To the audience)* So much bother over such a tiny thing. When men sense something they cannot control, they panic. And like Adam, they adore the game of names. Pervert. Sadist. Lesbian. "Clitorite." How fortunate that even in this day and age, there still are things which have no name, nor never shall.

DARLING *(Snapping out of his trance)* The court will hear the verdict.

MAUD And the rest, I fear, you know already.

DARLING This judge finds in favour of the defendant, Roger Pemberton-Billing.

MAUD Broken promises.

DARLING And does hereby order all performances of *Salomé* repealed.
Court adjourned!

MAUD At least the original Salomé got to cradle her prize.

GREIN But once she had the head of John the Baptist, Herod ordered all his
guards to kill her.

MAUD And she died with her enemy's head in her hands. It is as close as any
woman gets to triumph.

BILLING Violence and death. Is that all you think of?

MAUD You have proved as much, sir, in a court of law. I am officially degenerate.

BILLING Thank God we menfolk are not so malevolent.

MAUD Oh, that reminds me, Mr. Billing. How's your war these days?

BILLING The tide has turned at last. They are predicting victory by winter.

MAUD Really! And with all those pervert traitors on the loose?

BILLING One less, at least.

MAUD Oh yes. You've done great service to your countrymen. And I must thank
you, too.

BILLING The trial is done, Miss Allan, and you lost. No need for your polite façade.

MAUD I promise you, my thanks are genuine.

BILLING And why the devil would you thank me? I destroyed your life. Your play,
your final chance at immortality. I tore the false face of Maud Allan off,
and found the Salomé beneath.

MAUD And still, I thank you. It is rare and good to see one's true self shine so
clearly, sir. And as for immortality...

A long line of Bowler-hatted Blokes hold up copies of The Vigilante. The covers sport huge photos of Maud, with the word "SCANDAL!" underneath.

You have ensured my story, and my face, shall last a hundred years.

BILLING A hundred...

MAUD Even two.

She pats him on the cheek, then moves her hand to cradle his chin—a gesture which resembles holding the head of John the Baptist.

And everything, I owe to you.

The lights fade out.

The End.



"It begins with the smallest of gestures: a flutter of lashes, like two midnight moths..." Maud Allen (Leslie Caffaro) describes the Vision of Salomé dance, July 2007. Photo: C.W. Hill Photography for Walterdale Theatre Associates.