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 Sharlin

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

She looks troubled.

Something terrible will happen.

She is coming this way!

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

Do not look at her!

Yes, she is coming towards us.

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

She is like...

She comes! The princess Salomé!

She is—

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

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

Who's this damp dishrag, then?

Admirer of yours?

No more of this obscene and rancid verbiage!

Now there, he must mean you.

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

Hang on a jif, there, mate.

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

Nor shall she, now nor never. (gives Syrian the paper. To the audience again) Gentlemen and ladies—and I use the terms equivocally—
“By order of the Grand High Court of London—”

You are here under false pretenses.

“This twenty-third of April, 1918—”

You came to witness this insipid drama.

“Salomé by Oscar Wilde—”

I’ve come to liberate you from that fate.

“All performances repealed!”

“Re-pealed.”

Yes.

Does that mean we’ve been pealed once already?

Naw, I told ya, Salomé’s not danced.

Now THAT is what I call a pealing.

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

She’s coming! Look!

Do not lay eyes on her!

Excuse me. What did I just say?

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

She is—

Now stop that! We’ve heard quite enough!

Enter Grein (instead of Salomé).

She’s really not herself today.

Roger Pemberton-Billing, Member of Parliament.
Jack Grein, Theatrical Nancy-Boy.

This is a private performance, Mr. Billing.

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

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

Oh, art? (To audience) It’s art you seek?

A densely splendid tapestry of verse and drama—

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

Please! Keep your seats!

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

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

Crave? Live flesh?

The moon is rising.

Crude poetical conceits and pornographic choreography?

She is a perfumed breeze that carries secrets.

She is coming.

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

Not anymore, it’s not.

Hide the moon in sackcloth!

She is coming!

You were there. The Judge was firm.

I beg you not to look at her.

The princess!
Salomé is over. End of story.

She is here!

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

And now, the play begins.

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

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

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

I'm taking offers.

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.

Now see here!

No one speaks such words of this celestial—

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

I was doing so. You interrupted.

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

Perhaps I merely hoped to see you one last time.

You think YOU can defend her honour?

If you'd let me—

Mr. Billing—

That is why you came, is it not?

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.
Salomé!

May I play Wilde? I do a splendid Wilde.

We do not need—

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

Drivel. That’s enough.

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

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

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

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

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.

That IS dramatic.

Mr. Billing is a natural.

(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.

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

Private Mills reporting from the Back Front, sir.

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—
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.

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

“ 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.

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

I am utterly in your accordance!

Who said we were starting?

Mister Grein, my dear, dear, Jack.

Lord Beaverbrook!

Your nation needs you. Britain craves your art.

I’m yours entirely!

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

I’ll fix your cock an’ bulls.

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?

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.”
The inimitable Miss Maud Allan.

The Prima Donna of the Canadas.

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

Magical—

And potent piece of choreography:

The Vision of Salomé.

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.*

I’ve courted her from Canada. She was retired.

Wooed across the ocean with the words of Wilde.

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—

Quintessent Salomé!

And that’ll liven up the troops?

I think it will.

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

I hear she danced for Persian princes once.

And la, the thing’s they’ll say!

I heard her dancing cured a blind man.

Rot!

I heard—

Blank poppycock!
I heard she was seen recreating after hours with the Lord Prime Minister.

It wasn’t the Prime Minister.

Oh no?

It was his wife.

Oh, so!

Oh my.

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.

Pumpernickel! Canterbury! Spatchcock!

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.

Ruddy insurrectionists!

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

Doctor!

And on special discharge.

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

March twenty-fifth, 1918.

Can’t trust ‘em, what they say. The ruddy sausage-eaters.

Captain Spencer—

Doctor!
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.

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

Apart from the alliteration? No.

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

This is not productive.

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

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

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 bumlark, neither. Generals, chiefs of staff, ay, members of parliament—

I am an MP, you know.

The WIVES of members of parliament—

How fortunate that I'm a bachelor.

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

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

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

You've seen the legendary Black Book?

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

You have, Doctor.

Captain!

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!
Doctor Captain –

Harold Spencer, Special Forces, Special Discharge, SIR!

I think I’ll leave now.

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

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

*She hands him a news clipping.*

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

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—

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

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?

Ay, ruddy viceroy.

So perhaps he'll print it?

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

And perhaps then I could meet him?

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

Sir ... my name is—

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

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

“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!”

*The Trial of Salomé*
I fear I cannot write the word “bullocks,” sir.

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

And—sorry, which one is Maud Allan?

Sodomites!

My hollyhocks!

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

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

That? What?

That word you said.

Thought-knocker?

Sod—som—somdom—

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.

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

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.

Amen to that.

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.

But I thought you were—never mind.

Across the stage, Dr. Cooke answers the phone.

Doctor Cooke speaking.
Serrel! This is Harold.

Harold! How’s your down-abouts? Has all the swelling settled down?

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?

(Covering her ears) Grandmother’s begonias!

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

Swimming!

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).

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

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

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

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

The truth. In all its grim veracity.

Our audience is scarcely set to hear such vulgar phrases.

Vulgar! What about Miss Allan’s former costume?

I am glad you found it so provoking.

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?

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

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.

COKE Quite. Where was I?

SPENCER “Cli—”

COKE Right. Cheers, sport.

SPENCER Not at all, mate.

COKE “—toris.”

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

COKE 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...

COKE 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!

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

Who owns this newspaper, this Vigilante?

A man named Roger Pemberton-Billing.

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

Bentinck consults the Black Book.

Nein, he's clean like kindergarten.

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.

Ja, ja, das blachenmail. So tell me. Billing, what are his Achilles’ heelses?

Well, he’s rather young. Impetuous. And he’s a bachelor.

You mean a jiggen-mit-den-fraulein-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.

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

Er, not exactly, Miss Allan—

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.

Miss Allan—

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.

Well put.
She has the most intoxicating taste.

For a colonial, no less.

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.

Indeed, a hundred. Two!

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

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

Ha ha! Very clever. But Miss Allan—

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

She has the most intoxicating face.

The face that launched a thousand lawsuits.

Now, don't get ahead of things.

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

Does it refer to me by name?

I fear it does.

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

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

Your head, Miss Allan.

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

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 vermillion, 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.*
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—”

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

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.

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.

You don’t mean...?

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

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

“... Immediate legal action.” Bloody hell. They’re going to sue us.

Ruddy suzerains!

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

Bilgewater! Trollop!

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

Ruddy onanists!

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

Mouldy fig.

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.

She’s one of ’em! I know. There’s something in her past, I just can’t place it.
Well, until you place it, we are facing infamy, derision, and high legal costs. If we're not careful, they can shut us down.

Ruddy shuttlecocks.

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

Bullocks!

No, the printing press.

Ahhh. In fer a penny...

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.

And that means...

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

“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.”

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

I thought you wanted to return to Canada.

That was a ploy to goad you into action.

Oh.

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

Does anyone?

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

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.

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

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

BILLING Oh no, you mustn't.

EILEEN It is not for Christian eyes to see.

BILLING Then get up close and listen.

EILEEN Mrs. Villiers-Stuart—

BILLING Miss.

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

BILLING So soon? But surely—

EILEEN Something in this place has got me rather buggered—BOthered.

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

More prima donna antics?

No, it does not feature you, sir.

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

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.

Oh my.

Typical.

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

Oh, for crinoline.

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

(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.

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

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

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

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

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—somdom—”

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!
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 Newsman*) 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.
Jabbernowl! Where have I heard Maud Allan's name before?

Where are the accusers?

Here, my lord.

And the defendant?

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

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

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.

You penned this article about Miss Allan, sir?

Not I. My facts checker, Captain Spencer.

But you own the newspaper.

Correct. But I was out to lunch.

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

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

Allan! Yes! Beefeating bastardy! Of course!

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

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

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

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.
Sir, you are out of order.

(To Grein) Jack, I want to go.

Who’s a ruddy genius? Spencer is! Spencer!

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

Miss Maud Allan. Well, well, well.

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

But you just said—

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

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

Yes. But—

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

I fail to see how that is relevant.

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

Ay, bonny schoolgirls. Studying to take the veil.

(Reading) And outraging their bodies after death!

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

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.

Then what, exactly, does?

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

“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. Homosexualism.

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.

*Act One*

---

*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.*
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 vermillion, 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?
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.

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

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

The trial of SALOMÉ!

Day Two. The trial begins!

_The London Times_ declares:


No mention of the trial, what what?

Don’t see it, mate.

Hm. Pity.
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.

You shall have to prove that.

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

My stars and garters!

Courage, Jack. For me.

For you, my flower.

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

Jack Thomas Grein. Are you an Englishman?

I am.

Of British origin?

Of Dutch.

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

Before the war.

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

I am indeed.

By Wilde, the pervert.

I object.

But Wilde was a convicted sodomite. His perversion is a matter of law.
I never had the privilege of meeting Mister Wilde, or seeing him in action, as it were.

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

It is a masterpiece.

Of perversion?

I object!

I have never found it perverse, myself.

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

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

Hence Mister Grein’s decision to hold PRIVATE spectacles.

Indeed.

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

Ah, beautiful.

How old is Salomé?

She is a child, awakening to womanhood.

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

Oh, I object.

No, no, it’s my turn.

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

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

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 representment 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 wouldest 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 wouldest 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.
All the world’s my stage, Mr. Billing, for as long as men have eyes and ears.

She exits. Billing is left alone onstage.

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.

It’s all right, sir. One can say “whore.” It’s in the Bible.

Is it?

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—

Quite.

Jane Smuts. A most devoted fan of yours.

You are the swooner from the other day.

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

So I’ve you to thank for all this … business.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This is simply too absurd to be a ruse.

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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

Perhaps another time.

The sisters will be so dismayed.

Please pass on my condolences.

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

Go on.

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—

(Mutters) Maud Allan.

—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—?


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

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.

Remarkable lady.

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

I object!

We haven’t even started yet.

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

More of that unpleasantness, what what?

‘Fraid so, my lord.

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

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

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

And who pens these articles?


Germans, mostly?

Now you come to mention it...

But sexual perversion does exist in England too?

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.


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

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

An enlightened female, sir.

I rest my case.

Then may we please close the book upon the clitoris?

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

I s’pose it might be very common, yes.

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

Well yes, that’s interesting. Might be how those clitorises get engorged to start with.

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

Yes.

Perverts? Members of the cult?

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

Dancing. Like the Dance of Salomé.

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

Let’s see it.

What?

My lord?
The dance. The one that Salomé performs, the Seven Veils.

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

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

My lord.

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

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

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

This is not a fitting venue.

That you’ll turn us all to deviants?

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

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

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

A harmless dance. A dalliance.

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

Miss Allan, dance for me. I order you.

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.

A dishonour? Here I come!

Now hang a jif, I heard it first!

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

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.


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!”
“Extraordinary Scenes and Outrageous Euphemisms!”

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

“Perverse Anatomical Secrets Revealed!”

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

Who told you about the Black Book?

My career is flashing before my eyes.

Mr. Billing, call your next witness.

Captain Harold Spencer, Special Forces, Special Discharge.

Your eminence, it is a great, great honour—

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


And your mission, as of last November, 1917?

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

Hubbub and hullabaloo.

Order! Order!

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

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!”

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?


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.
I have?

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

I have. The Black Book has a convoluted past—

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.

—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.

(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.
Miss Allan, I would never dream of—

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.

Yet I do suspect that you are one, yourself.

One what, Eileen?

A dreamer.

Yes. Perhaps I am.

What do you dream about?

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

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.

Keep dancing, Maud. You must keep dancing.

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

Keep dancing.

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.

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

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

Your face.
I see. Any feature in particular?

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.

Not hungry, then?

Someone might see us. Take advantage—

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

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

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?

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!”
“What Will Billing Drag Out Next?”

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!

Did you say “knickers”?

I … my lord, I think I need a recess.

But we’ve barely started.

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

More dancing ponies, Mr. Billing?

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

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.

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.

You must ask the witness proper questions, Mr. 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?

In America.

And elsewhere?

Yes. In Germany.

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.
My lord, I must object.

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

I couldn’t say.

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

She did seem frightened.

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—

You really think I’m powerless?

(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?

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

What about your brother, William?

Mr. Billing. Let us not return there.

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

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

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

I am not Salomé.

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

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

At least the original Salomé got to cradle her prize.

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

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

Violence and death. Is that all you think of?

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

Thank God we menfolk are not so malevolent.

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

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

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

One less, at least.

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

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

I promise you, my thanks are genuine.

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.

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.*