

Excerpt from *The Trial of Salomé* by Scott Sharplin

*Set in London in 1917, this satirical play-within-a-play is inspired by a scandal surrounding Canadian dancer Maud Allan, who was accused of libel and homosexuality while attempting to perform in Oscar Wilde's Salomé. This scene occurs at the end of Act One, as the libel trial begins and Allan faces her nemesis, the demagogue Member of Parliament, Roger Pemberton-Billing.*

CHORUS

The trial of *Salomé!* Day One: The arraignment!

*MAUD, GREIN, and CHORUS at one side of the stage; BILLING, SPENCER, and EILEEN, at the other.*

BILLING

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

*SPENCER exits.*

BILLING

Ah, the Jezebel herself.

MAUD

That is a separate Bible story, Mr. Billing. I play Salomé.

BILLING

Both are fallen women in need of repentance.

MAUD

Repentance is quite out of date. 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.

*As SPENCER returns with a stack of books:*

CHORUS

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

BILLING

Oh, blooming socks, not Justice Darling.

DARLING

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

SPENCER

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

DARLING

Where are the accusers?

GREIN

Here, my lord.

DARLING

And the defendant?

EILEEN

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

SPENCER

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

BILLING

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

DARLING

You penned this article about Miss Allan, sir?

BILLING

Not I. My facts checker, Captain Spencer.

DARLING

But you own the newspaper.

BILLING

Correct. But I was out to lunch.

DARLING

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

BILLING

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

SPENCER

Allan! Yes! Beefeating bastardy! Of course!

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

BILLING

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

*BILLING urges EILEEN to try to calm SPENCER down while DARLING talks.*

DARLING

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

BILLING

Yes...

DARLING

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

BILLING

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?

MAUD

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

DARLING

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

SPENCER

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

*BILLING takes the book that SPENCER was looking at, while SPENCER does a ridiculous victory dance.*

DARLING

Sir, you are out of order.

MAUD

*[to GREIN]*

Jack, I want to go.

SPENCER

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

DARLING

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

BILLING

Miss Maud Allan. Well, well, well.

MAUD

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

DARLING

But you just said—

MAUD

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

BILLING

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

MAUD

Yes. But—

BILLING

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

DARLING

I fail to see how that is relevant.

BILLING

*[hands the book to the judge]*

William Henry Allan, convicted, executed, 1898, upon the charge of murdering two girls.

SPENCER

Ay, bonny schoolgirls. Studying to take the veil.

DARLING

*[reading]*

And outraging their bodies after death!

MAUD

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

BILLING

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

DARLING

Then what, exactly, does?

GREIN

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

DARLING

"The Cult of the..."

BILLING

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

*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