

Doric Wilson's

NOW SHE DANCES!

a
fantasia on the trial of Oscar Wilde
in two acts

for Richard Barr, Joe Cino and Charles Loubier

Shortly after *The Importance of Being Earnest* premiered in 1895, Oscar Wilde brought legal proceedings for slander against the Marquis of Queenberry. This determination to establish his heterosexuality before the bench caused the public scandal which led to his to his degrading second trial and imprisonment.

Operating on three main levels, *Now She Dances!* is a metaphor for this trial, blending characters from Wilde's *Salome* and *Earnest* with a Post-Modernist America. The denizens of Herod's decayed and corrupt court discover themselves constrained in the lace and frippery of a polite Victorian comedy of manners where they sit in judgement on a contemporary stand-in for Wilde.

The proceedings of this play are ruled over by Moloch, a deity who demanded of parents that their children be burnt in sacrifice.

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NOW SHE DANCES was first presented as a one act play at the Caffe Cino, 31 Cornelia Street, August, 1961. Produced by Joe Cino, directed by William Ashley, the Cino cast was as follows:

LANE	Thomas Lawrence
BILL	William Galarno
GLADYS	Jane Lowry
MISS SALOME	Lueretia Simmons
LADY HERODIAS	Zita Jenner
SIR HEROD, K.C.B	John Bevan
PRISONER	Doric Wilson

NOW SHE DANCES! was extensively rewritten and extended into two acts for TOSOS Theatre Company. It opened at the Basement Theatre of TOSOS, 257 Church Street, September 11th, 1975, playing 14 weeks, 54 performances. The production was invited to Fordham University at Lincoln Center to participate in the Common Ground II Festival, where it played 2 performances, April 30th and May 1st, 1976. Produced and directed for TOSOS by Doric Wilson. Associate producers, Bill Blackwell and John Glines, Stage Manager, Mark Hansen, sets by Jack Logan, costumes by Bill Blackwell and Michael Bowers, the TOSOS cast and replacements were as follows:

LANE	Michael O'Brien
BILL	Dale Carman
GLADYS	Mary Portser
MISS SALOME	Sally Eaton, Caroline Yeager
LADY HERODIAS	Barbara Berge, Marianne Leone
SIR HEROD, K.C.B.	John Michel, Brian Benben
PRISONER	John H. Murphy, Greg Michaels

NOW SHE DANCES! was further revised in Seattle, Washington, from 1984 to 1987; Los Angeles, California from 1987 to 1991; and New York City, from 1992 to 1999.

Characters:

LANE, a butler with references from another play

GLADYS, a maid with references from many other plays

BILL, the new footman

SIR HEROD, K.C.B., a judge of the highest court

LADY HERODIAS, his dowager sister

The Hon. MISS SALOME, her diffident daughter

The PRISONER in the summerhouse

Time:

now and then

Setting:

a performance space

Act One

(An empty stage lit by a work light. Scattered about is shabby rehearsal furniture and a rack with costumes to be used later in the play. During the preset BILL enters from offstage and, acting as a stagehand, begins removing the furniture.)

(BILL, the new footman, is heartily young and blatantly American. Self-centered in his narrow sense of masculinity, he corresponds with the Young Syrian in Wilde's *Salome*. He wears Levi's and a T-shirt reading: "Nuke 'em All.")

(As BILL exits offstage with the next to last load of furniture, the house lights dim and the ACTRESS who will play MISS SALOME and the ACTOR who will play SIR HEROD enter down the aisle.)

(The ACTOR is an aging matinee idol deteriorated into a rouged and rugged roué. His wardrobe is frayed foppish, he wears his topcoat casually draped over his shoulders. Later, as SIR HEROD he is Algernon well past his prime.)

(Dressed in anticipation of fame and fortune, the ACTRESS is an ingénue with a future. Later, as MISS SALOME, she is an uneasy blend of Gwendolen and the ecdysiast of the New Testament—on the surface, a diffident daughter of propriety, in her soul, a carnivorous priestess of Moloch.)

(As the ACTOR and the ACTRESS reach the foot of the aisle, the play-within-a-play-within-a-play begins.)

ACTRESS: (Disdainful of her surroundings.) Is this -?

ACTOR: (Arms wide) A theater!

ACTRESS: Disgusting.

ACTOR: Atmospheric.

ACTRESS: Claustrophobic.

ACTOR: (Attending her with smirking lechery.) Intimate.

ACTRESS: (Looking around as she ascends to the stage.) Not at all what I was lead to expect...

ACTOR: I think it's what they term experimental!

ACTRESS: (Doubtful) I sincerely hope not-

ACTOR: (Grabbing for her hand.) You're here, I'm here—we can still make this a meaningful experience.

ACTRESS: (Pulling away.) Save it for later.

ACTOR: What need have you and I for flimsy make-believe? (Falling to his knees.) Deep in my heart-

ACTRESS: I said later.

(BILL enters from offstage to remove the last of the rehearsal furniture.)

ACTOR: (To BILL.) You're new.

BILL: (Defensive.) What's it to you?

ACTOR: (To the actress, insinuating.) Another "new" one.

ACTRESS: (Crossing to the costume rack.) Five in the last month.

ACTOR: (Following the ACTRESS.) Whatever does Lane do with them all?

BILL: Five what?

ACTOR: My costume hasn't been cleaned.

BILL: Not my job.

ACTRESS: (Examining the hem of her SALOME costume.) What precisely is your job?

(LANE, temporarily acting as stage manager, enters from off-stage, carrying a clip board. A butler with excellent references from *The Importance of Being Earnest*, LANE is smug and guarded—the quintessential closet queen. He wears pin striped trousers and a work apron. The rest of his butler's rig—vest, stiff collar and swallow tailed coat—wait on the costume rack.)

LANE: (As he enters, protective of BILL.) William will know his duties all in good time.

(BILL exits offstage with the last of the rehearsal furniture.)

ACTOR: (To LANE.) My costume-

LANE: We couldn't afford to send it out.

ACTOR: (To the ACTRESS.) With all due respect to you, m'dear—(To LANE.)—we seem to have found the funds to clean hers.

ACTRESS: Mine are never soiled. (To LANE, indicating an exuberant red feathered fan.) What is this?

LANE: Your mother acquired it yesterday-

ACTOR: (To LANE, a throwaway.) -from Pick-n-Pay?

LANE: (To ACTOR, a throwaway.) A traveling Gypsy.

ACTRESS: She intends to use it?

LANE: In Act Two.

ACTOR: It's in character.

ACTRESS: I wouldn't know. I never rely on props. (To LANE.) You might suggest to dearest mamma-

LANE: I've given her fair warning.

ACTRESS: (Shades of SALOME.) Are you interrupting me?

LANE: Anticipating.

ACTRESS: (Sweetly.) -you might suggest to dearest mamma, ever so nicely, that, in my final scene, should I notice even a flick of this fan, I shall throttle her where she sits.

ACTOR: Before we commence our little comedy, would you care to nip by my dressing room for a dram of Madeira, m'dear?

ACTRESS: You truly are, aren't you?

ACTOR: Dashing? Dauntless? Debonair?

ACTRESS: Wholly and altogether without redeeming social content.

(The ACTRESS exits backstage toward her dressing room.)

ACTOR: Hopelessly in love with me. They always are, all the ingénues. The price one pays for possessing a profile.

LANE: Might I remind you she is your daughter.

ACTOR: (Tightly.) We've only my sister's word for that.

LANE: (Disapproving.) But surely-

ACTOR: We both know how Herodias tends to muddle everything...(Before LANE can object.)...should, in fact, the dear child be less kith than kin, we would do well to remember "the times they are a changing." One must be au courant.

LANE: Au contraire, one must be-

ACTOR: (As SIR HEROD.) Servants do not speak French.

LANE: (As the butler.) Very well, milord.

ACTOR: And spare me epigrams that snicker at incest.

LANE: As you say, milord.

ACTOR: A tone of censure? From you, Lane? (An innuendo.) What did happen to the last one?

LANE: (In all innocence.) The last one what?

(BILL enters from offstage.)

ACTOR: His "predecessor."

LANE: -proved unsatisfactory. (To BILL.) William, stand by to bring on the set.

(BILL exits to the scene dock as GLADYS enters from the lobby. A maid with references from many other plays, she is arbitrary in her commitment to this one. A single woman of uncertain age, GLADYS is sister to Miss Prism. Dressed in contemporary street clothes, she carries her make-up kit, a PBS tote bag and her maid's costume on a hanger.)

GLADYS: (To the audience, as she enters.) Please, I'm late...which way is the rose garden? The rose garden, where is it?

LANE: Up here, Gladys.

GLADYS: (Hurrying down the aisle.) Yes! Indeed! Up there you are, the evil-doer and the evil-done-unto! Problem is, which is which?

ACTOR: You're late.

GLADYS: We've already established that.

LANE: Very late.

GLADYS: (Climbing onto the stage.) You're lucky I made it here at all. You won't believe the public transit in this berg. This one creep in a trench coat-

ACTOR: (Correcting.) Not "transit-"

LANE: -tram.

ACTOR: (Patronizing.) Please try to remember, this is a period piece.

GLADYS: And so are you, dearie. (To the audience.) Ain't he a picture of days gone by, what with his wavy rug and cheeks of rouge? Used to be a matinee idol, he was. Before electricity. (To the ACTOR) Had hair and teeth and everything, didn't you ? Practically everything.

LANE: (Censuring.) Gladys-

GLADYS: (To the audience.) This one here's the butler. Very pompous he is, our Lane.

LANE: Gladys!

GLADYS: (To the audience.) And the terror of the footmen. (Tweaking LANE under the chin.) Grabs them above the knee in the pantry.

LANE: Gladys, that will do!!

ACTOR: Costumes are not to be removed from the theatre.

GLADYS: Took it back to my digs to wash it. Felt one of us should attempt to maintain some semblance of personal hygiene.

LANE: You'd best go in and change.

ACTOR: Tardy as you are.

GLADYS: (Looking around the stage.) Where's the set? Finance company repossess it? Fire Department find it too inflammatory? National Endowment revoke our grant?

LANE: (As the butler.) The French doors lead from this rose garden into the London townhouse of Sir Herod, K.C.B..

GLADYS: (Still uncertain.) French doors-?

ACTOR: (To GLADYS.) You, however, use the servants entrance-

LANE: (Indicating upstage right.) -back by the compost pile.

GLADYS: (To LANE.) I don't need this job, you know. I've played more maids in more plays than you've had arrests for moral turpitude in Piccadilly tearooms.

(GLADYS exits downstage left, establishing a nonconforming attitude toward entrances and exits she will maintain throughout the play.)

ACTOR: (To LANE, a general to his aide.) The preparations-?

LANE: -are proceeding.

ACTOR: Tricky business seduction, requires the same meticulous attention to detail as a military campaign.

LANE: I've been briefed with tonight's battle plan.

ACTOR: The troops-?

LANE: Deployed.

ACTOR: The artillery-?

LANE: Primed.

ACTOR: The lady in question-?

LANE: -unsuspecting.

ACTOR: My technique l'amour is derived entirely from the principles of armed conflict as delineated by Attila the Hun.

LANE: I might never have guessed.

ACTOR: Not much of a gentleman, that barbarian, but a damned fine strategist, roman-tically speaking.

LANE: The combatant's Kama Sutra?

ACTOR: As my friend the Marquis of Queensberry is wont to say, "the female of the species must always be treated as a treacherous adversary."

LANE: Sporting of him.

ACTOR: Lull the wench into a false sense of security with moonlight and music and when she lowers her drawbridge, mount your assault, rapier in hand!

LANE: The charge of the light brigade?

ACTOR: The ladies love it.

LANE: (Under his breath.) Whatever gets you off.

ACTOR: Music is mandatory.

LANE: (Evading.) There will be music.

ACTOR: (Licentiously.) Ravel's *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*?

LANE: As you requested.

ACTOR: Tape or CD?

LANE: Long play record.

ACTOR: (Crossing to the costume rack.) Damned nuisance those musician chaps, demanding to be paid.

LANE: Fancy actors behaving so unprofessionally.

ACTOR: (Taking his costume.) We can hardly expect Miss Salome to dance a capella.

LANE: Assuming she condescends to dance at all.

ACTOR: Not dance? Don't be preposterous. It's expected...it's a matter of tradition...it's ...it's in the script.

LANE: Then you need not worry.

ACTOR: (Almost an afterthought.) As for the blood-

LANE: The blood will be authentic. Thick...warm...red...and most convincing.

ACTOR: Yes...well...jolly good.

(The ACTOR exits offstage to his dressing room carrying his costumes.)

BILL: (Coming to the edge of the stage.) Lot's of junk back here.

LANE: Start handing it out.

BILL: (Returning to the scene dock.) What do you want first?

LANE: (Checking his clipboard.) Flora. Let's set up the undergrowth.

BILL: (Offstage.) Trees? Flowers? Shrubs?

LANE: William, bring on garden.

(BILL enters from the scene dock with a wing flat, which LANE and he position downstage left. As the scene progresses, they will set the stage to represent the rose garden of SIR HEROD's London townhouse.)

(The scenery, when in place, is patched and peeling and flatly two-dimensional. Pictorially Victorian, it is lushly painted with indolent begonias and overblown roses intertwined in a sinister mesh of excessive ferns and convoluted vines. Through a gap in this strangle of shrubbery is glimpsed SIR HEROD's stately home. Ornamental steps, flanked by fuchsia laden urns, lead to French doors and within.)

BILL: (As he enters.) Whose blood?

LANE: (Assisting BILL.) Not your concern. (Reminiscing.) I remember as if it were yesterday my coming into the employ of this house. Palestine Walk it was known as in those days. My father—he was head eunuch—brought me in to amuse the boys. Young master Philip, young master Archelaus and young master Herod—"Antipas" we called him below the stairs. As the old earl—Herod Antipater—was notoriously lethal toward children, we were confined to the tower. (His eyes misting over.) The tower. What fond memories. There were rafters in the tower and chains and manacles and assorted other implements of persuasion. On rainy days the young masters were forever devising recreation, which inevitably was me. Boys being boys, I was frequently...well. I doubt they meant me permanent harm. (With malicious pleasure.) Philip was the first to go. Done in by a fetish for the sea. A grappling hook to the thorax. A bit fishy, as he was discovered in his own bath, nearly a hundred miles from the nearest merchant marine. Archelaus was next to meet his maker. It was Christmas Eve. The family was in the drawing room playing charades. Archelaus was acting out King Edward the Second, somebody had tampered with the poker. Most unfortunate. Authentic as hell. At the time Sir Herod was blamed as he had been observed, not a moment before, stoking the yule log. (as a portend.) Now Herod himself, the last of the line . . .

BILL: (Referring to HEROD.) He's a big shot?

LANE: (Back to here and now.) Sir Herod is a lord justice of the highest court, a peer of the realm, a personage of ancient lineage, staggering debts and impeccable prominence.

BILL: Says who?

LANE: Debrett's.

BILL: What's that?

LANE: A book which tells you who's who.

BILL: (As he exits to the scene dock.) My mom doesn't approve of books.

LANE: She's illiterate?

BILL: (Offstage.) Naw, she's been married seven times.

(BILL enters from the scene dock with a second wing flat. LANE helps him place it downstage right.)

LANE: Where did she acquire her antipathy to literature?

BILL: Grade school.

LANE: Prodigious of her.

BILL: Mom says books pervert the mind.

LANE: (Fascinated.) Your mother's an authority on perverts?

BILL: We had a whole library of books in our town, but mom got all the church ladies together and they cleaned it out. (As he exits to the scene dock.) Except for the Bible.

LANE: You're a student of scripture?

BILL: (Offstage.) I have a friend in Christ.

LANE: Then you'll feel right at home in our little scenario, it's vaguely Biblical.

(BILL enters from the scene dock with a third wing flat. LANE helps him place it stage left.)

BILL: (As he enters.) I've been born again.

LANE: How uncomfortable.

BILL: Have you been saved?

LANE: From what?

BILL: Eternal damnation.

LANE: Probably not.

BILL: (Making a fist.) You deny Jesus?

LANE: Nothing personal. He goes his way, I go mine.

BILL: Refuse salvation, I'll punch you in the face.

LANE: Threatening me bodily harm?

BILL: Only cause I love you.

LANE: (Charmed.) William.

BILL: I'm a Christian, I love all creatures great and small. Except the humanists.

LANE: (Intrigued.) And punching me in the face is how you express affection?

BILL: (As he exits to the scene dock.) If it'll save your soul.

LANE: How came you to our "sceptred isle?"

BILL: (Offstage.) Where?

LANE: How did you arrive in England?

BILL: (Offstage.) I hitch-hiked.

(BILL enters from the scene dock with a fourth wing flat. LANE helps him place it stage right.)

LANE: Wanderlust?

BILL: Nah, an itch to travel.

LANE: To see the world?

BILL: To get away from my step dad.

LANE: Unsympathetic was he?

BILL: Nah, he kicked me out.

LANE: What did he catch you doing?

BILL: Failing.

LANE: At what?

BILL: Nothing in particular.

LANE: An all-around underachiever?

BILL: (With pride.) School, sports, selling used cars—you name it, I'm unsuccessful at it.

LANE: (With an ulterior motive.) Are you currently fiancé?

BILL: Beg pardon?

LANE: Have you a girl friend?

BILL: Don't you?

LANE: You must miss her.

BILL: Not as much as I miss my best buddy.

LANE: This "buddy" of yours, why didn't he accompany you on your travels?

BILL: He got married.

LANE: To your girl friend.

BILL: (Impressed.) How'd you know that?

LANE: Intuition.

BILL: So I'm working my way to the Holy Lands.

LANE: A pilgrimage.

BILL: Nah, to join the Marines and sock it to the infidels.

LANE: Which infidels in particular?

BILL: Arabs, Jews, liberal Democrats...all them Godless heathens.

LANE: How romantic.

BILL: (Sneering.) Romance is woman's stuff.

LANE: What would you call running off to the Foreign Legion to nurse a broken heart?

BILL: Real men don't get broken hearts, they have coronaries.

LANE: You'll look most impressive in uniform.

BILL: Yeah, I know.

LANE: You definitely have the physique for it.

BILL: (Flexing.) I do, don't I?

LANE: Awesome musculature.

BILL: Wanta feel my biceps?

LANE: (Tempted.) This hardly seems the time or the place-

BILL: (Ingenuous.) Ah...come on...It's just between us guys.

LANE: (Uncomfortable.) The possibilities are most intriguing.

BILL: (Flexing) Grab a hold of this.

LANE: (About to succumb.) The probability fraught with-

(Before LANE can make his move, GLADYS pops out from behind the just placed stage right flat. She wears her maid's costume and a dust cap, carries an immense transistor radio, street variety, and an old fashioned phonograph horn.)

GLADYS: (As she enters.) Hope I'm not intruding.

LANE: (Rapidly moving away from BILL.) Not at all.

GLADYS: (To BILL.) Why hello there.

BILL: Howdy.

GLADYS: (Vamping.) Where has Lane been keeping you?

LANE: Busy.

GLADYS: (To BILL.) My friends call me Gladioli Glad.

LANE: William is occupied. As you should be, Gladys.

GLADYS: (To BILL.) Don't talk much, do you?

LANE: When he has something to say.

GLADYS: (To BILL.) The strong silent type?

BILL: Yep.

GLADYS: (Offering the radio and horn to LANE.) Before you go all red in the face and start stomping about in a snit, I'm well aware this phonograph isn't strictly period so I scrounged around in the attic and found this old morning-glory horn—isn't it a hoot?

LANE: (Horrified.) A transistor radio?

GLADYS: Or as they say in the vestibule, a ghetto blaster. I liberated it from a nubile number in pink spandex who almost ran me down on his ruby red roller skates.

LANE: (Returning the radio and horn to GLADYS.) This is in no way suitable.

GLADYS: Sure it is. (Trying to attach the horn to the radio.) We simply insert...jam this into here—(The radio complains loudly.)—and we have an almost plausible facsimile Gramophone, circa here and now, by which I mean then and—(Frustrated, she gives the radio and horn to BILL.)—there, you're male, you're mechanically inclined.

(GLADYS exits hastily to the wings. A baffled BILL exits to the scene dock trying to figure out how to connect the horn to the radio as LADY HERODIAS, a dowager dreadnought, enters full steam down the aisle. Bracknell deranged, LADY H is dressed for the boulevards of 1895. She carries a beaded reticule, her hat is a fantastic bird of prey.)

LADY H: (Barging down the aisle.) I came the back way through the streets. I felt it best to avoid scrutiny. (To the audience.) I can not with clear conscience recommend the streets. The people one encounters on them are revolting. Actively. (As she climbs onto the stage.) Indeed, I've a maxim for you. Curb your every inclination toward pedestrianism—it only puts you in proximity with the wrong people.

LANE: (Conspiratorially.) Did you accomplish your mission.

LADY H: (Warily.) My swine of a brother?

LANE: Sir Herod is feeding the falcons.

LADY H: You mean he's stumbling into to his costume between swigs from the bottle. He better stay sober tonight. (A sudden thought.) He isn't...he hasn't-

LANE: He suspects nothing.

LADY H: And my diffident daughter? My guileless little girl?

LANE: Miss Salome is in the music room, whittling.

LADY H: (As Mata Hari.) Step aside.

(Before LANE can comply, BILL enters from the scene dock with the flat depicting the facade of the house. Guiltily, LANE and LADY H quickly separate. LANE helps BILL position the flat upstage center.)

LADY H: (For BILL's benefit.) The garden is pulling itself together quite nicely. (Indicating the foliage depicted on the wing flats.) Look, hemlock in full bloom and it's only May. And foxglove...and there, deadly nightshade...and here, look, dainty belladonna...how I do prefer the domestic poisons. They take me back to when I was but a sprig of a thing—a silly miss—gathering me banewart where I might.

BILL: (Alarmed.) Poison?

LANE: Roses and begonias, all very benign. (To LADY H) You're overloading the metaphor.

BILL: (Still suspicious.) What's a metaphor?

LADY H: You are. (To the audience.) Years ago Lane brought home this languid lad with aesthetic posture and creative hair who designed our set for us and then was seen no more. (To LANE.) Did we ever recover the family silver?

BILL: If this Herod guy's such a hot shot-

LANE: Yes, William?

BILL: -how come he doesn't have real plants?

LADY H: (Nonplus.) Qu'est-ce que c'est "real?"

BILL: You know, plastic—like they have on TV.

LADY H: (Affronted.) Television?

BILL: That's my big ambition. To be on the tube.

LANE: You aspire to fame and fortune?

BILL: Nah, I want to crash cars and kill people.

LADY H: (To LANE, a throwaway.) Wherever did you pick up this one? No, I'd rather not know. (To BILL, as before.) Young man, are you reliable?

BILL: What's in it for me?

LANE: (To LADY H.) He's colonial.

LADY H: Nonsense. They never put Americans on the stage. Not even in America. (To the audience.) I've played Masterpiece Theater, I know of what I speak. (To BILL.) Young man, tonight, here in the garden, Lane and I are planning an intimate tête-à-tête—nothing actually outré, but should the proceedings turn a trifle-

LANE: (Warning.) Milady-

LADY H: Shouldn't he be in on it?

BILL: In on what?

LANE: Nothing which concerns you.

LADY H: (To BILL.) Young man, I've a maxim for you. Delve not.

(A puzzled BILL exits to the scene dock.)

LANE: (Pulling LADY H aside.) Did you accomplish your mission?

LADY H: (Referring to the streets.) Out there in the streets is anarchy. Fuzzy fiscal policies stalking the better shops, radicals running riot, left to right, close personal acquaintances hanging from the lampposts—but for the sake of you and your silly mission I gathered me skirts about my and persevered, when suddenly, to my horror, there, before me, was...was...was-

LANE: (Skeptical.) "What?"

LADY H: A hand.

LANE: A hand?

LADY H: Your usual five fingers. Nothing out of the ordinary. No, now that I recall, there was an ink smudge near the knuckle of the third digit from the thumb. Or was it the first digit from the pinkie?

LANE: (Losing patience.) Had this hand a face?

LADY H: I daren't look. There stood I, there stood the faceless hand—the both of us poised on the precipice of an impasse. And then I saw it. The anonymous appendage with the ominous ink stain was proffering to me a piece of paper.

(BILL enters from the scene dock with a step unit which he places at the French doors.)

LANE: A piece of-?

LADY H: -8½ by 11 inch rag bond with miscellaneous mimeography on it. Which I instantly disposed of in the proper receptacle. (LANE reaches out his hand.) It may have inadvertently slipped into my reticule. (Producing the piece of piece of paper.)

(As LANE reaches for the paper, GLADYS appears from the wings and intercepts it.)

GLADYS: (Snatching the paper.) A flyer!

LANE: A circular of protest?

LADY H: Such a polite, well-groomed young man. You'd never guess he was a dirty Bolshevik, bent on circulating protest.

LANE: I thought you didn't see him.

LADY H: I didn't.

BILL: What's he protesting?

LADY H: Me. They're always protesting me.

LANE: (To GLADYS, curious about the cause.) Save the whales? Ban the bomb? Free the Standard and Poor's 100?

GLADYS: (Perusing the flyer.) It's something about the G.D.F..(As she comprehends)..Ha! Lady Herodias, avert your eyes!

LADY H: It's off-color?

GLADYS: Depravity, pure and simple.

BILL: Porno?

GLADYS: (Offering the flyer to LANE, a gleam in her eye.) This, I think, is addressed to you.

LANE: (Reaching for the flyer.) Me?

LADY H: (Intercepting the flyer.) What would Lane want with obscenity?

LANE: (Attempting to retrieve the flyer.) Mine, milady.

LADY H: (Examining the flyer front and back.) I see no depravity. (To GLADYS.) Gladys, you were titillating us. Oh...here it tells what "G.D.F." stands for. (Reading.) "Gay Defensive Front."

LANE: (Under his breath.) Peachy.

LADY H: (Looking to LANE.) Gay? Happy? I don't understand. Why be defensive about being happy.

BILL: If they're so happy, why run around protesting?

LANE: (Dismissing BILL.) William-

BILL: I'm on a break.

LANE: (Pushing BILL toward the scene dock.) The grownups need to talk.

BILL: (Reluctantly exiting.) Just when it starts to get interesting.

LADY H: (Flyer in hand.) Will somebody explain this to me?

LANE: (On the spot.) I...er...

GLADYS: (Enjoying LANE's discomfort.) It's an euphemism.

LADY H: An euphemism for what?

LANE: An euphemism for an euphemism.

LADY H: To be happy?

GLADYS: The synonym.

LADY H: Gay?

LANE: Does milady chance to remember Oscar Wilde?

LADY H: Mr. Oscar Wilde is not a fit subject for conversation. Certainly not in a family entertainment.

GLADYS: The circular comes from one of them.

LADY H: One of whom?

LANE: Mr. Wilde's progeny.

LADY H: They don't have progeny.

GLADYS: (Still needling LANE.) We throw 'em all in jail.

LANE: We seem to have missed one or two.

LADY H: (Staggered by the thought.) You mean to say out there in the streets I was placed in juxtaposition

with a...with a...

GLADYS: "Sodomist!"* (*See the trials of Oscar Wilde.)

(BILL enters from the scene dock with an urn.)

BILL: (As he enters.) A sodo-what?

LANE: (Taking the urn from BILL.) An unlicenced proctologist.

(BILL exits back to the scene dock.)

LADY H: I might have been molested.

LANE: (Placing the urn next to the step unit.) I sincerely doubt it.

LADY H: (Waving the flyer.) This is an omen.

LANE: It is nothing of the sort.

LADY H: The writing's on the wall, I tell you. There...above our heads..."Mene Mene Tekel Upharsim!*" Mimeographed. (*The writing on the wall.)

LANE: That particular message was meant for Belshazzar.

GLADYS: It's all in the family.

(BILL enters from the scene dock with the second urn which he places next to the step unit.)

LADY H: Whatever is this country coming to?

GLADYS: Perversion lurking in every byway?

LADY H: Are none of us safe?

GLADYS: Shall we all be murdered in our beds by bad Judy Garland impersonations?

LANE: (To LADY H, unaware of BILL.) I entrusted you with an errand of the utmost importance, some street queen gives you a flyer and you go all unglued. You return the back way, empty handed.

LADY H: (As a drug transaction.) The password?

LANE: Cut the flummery.

LADY H: (To GLADYS, as she extracts a parcel from the folds of her costume.) Gladys, keep a peeled eye.

LANE: (Eagerly.) You managed to score?

LADY H: It had to be arranged.

LANE: (Snatching the parcel and tearing it open.) How much arranged?

LADY H: Our usual source was not available.

LANE: (Revealing a long play record album.) As long as it's legitimate.

LADY H: I paid more than the going price.

LANE: (Reading the album title.) Holy Mother of Moloch!

LADY H: What?

LANE: (Returning the album with great disdain.) *Beginner's Burlesque?*

LADY H: (Reading from the liner notes.) "Bump your way out of the daily grind?"

GLADYS: (Snatching the album from LADY H, reading the notes.) "Flesh and how to flash it?"

BILL: (Sneaking a peek at the cover.) Hot damn!

(LANE glares at BILL, causing him to exit to the scene dock.)

LANE: (To LADY H.) You seriously expect Miss Salome to frolic about the shrubbery in her all together accompanied by snare drums and slide trombones?

LADY H: I naturally expect my dear daughter to- (The horrible realization hits home.)

LANE: Precisely.

LADY H: We're dead meat.

GLADYS: T'ain't missing tonight's shindig for nothing. (She hums a bump and grind rendition of *The Snake Charmer's Dance* while doing a Sally Rand fan dance with the album cover.) I see Paris, I see France, I see Salome's underpants-

LADY H: (Retrieving the album from GLADYS.) Steady, Gladys!

LANE: (To LADY H.) Take it back.

LADY H: Take it back?

LANE: Explain to the clerk that this is not the noble and sentimental waltzes of Ravel.

LADY H: Unhappily-

LANE: Simply demand he make an exchange.

LADY H: I doubt he'll still be operating from the same street corner.

GLADYS: Street corner?

LANE: But surely-

GLADYS: Milady's made a bum connection.

LADY H: I've been hornswoggled.

LANE: What am I to tell Sir Herod?

LADY H: (Giving the album to LANE.) I've a maxim for you. Make do.

LANE: (Appalled.) "Make do?"

LADY H: We all know who's behind this sabotage. (Brandishing the flyer.) The Gay Defensive Front. This is their doing. Oscar Wilde's revenge. A conspiracy of Gannymedes. Well, they shan't get away with it. I will see them hang! Drawn and quartered! Vasectomized! (As she exits, a rogue caribou.) Herod?! Herod, dear brother?! Debauched...debased...I've been undone!

GLADYS: His lordship'll have apoplexy.

LANE: (Looking for somewhere to hide the album.) His lordship need never know.

GLADYS: As for the kid, she'll have a conniption.

LANE: Miss Salome is no kid.

(The ACTRESS enters upstage right, wearing a dressing gown.)

ACTRESS: (To GLADYS, as she enters.) You.

GLADYS: Yeah?

ACTRESS: "Yeah?"

GLADYS: (As a proper maid.) Yes, Miss, I'm sure.

(LANE takes advantage of the ACTRESS's distraction to hide the album behind one of the urns.)

ACTRESS: (Watching LANE out of the corner of her eye.) I'm not at all sure.

GLADYS: No, Miss.

ACTRESS: I've seen you somewhere before.

GLADYS: I've worked for a lot of other plays.

ACTRESS: (With a lethal smile.) It's unlikely we frequent the same plays.

GLADYS: Yes, Miss.

ACTRESS: It's even less likely we frequent the same playwrights.

GLADYS: No, Miss.

ACTRESS: (Sweetly.) My costumes?

GLADYS: Immediately.

(GLADYS gathers the SALOME costumes from the rack and exits upstage right toward the dressing room.)

ACTRESS: (To LANE, referring to LADY H's exit.) Have we degenerated into improv-isation?

LANE: Not if I can prevent it.

ACTRESS: I could hear mamma's histrionics all the way to my dressing room.

LANE: A slight deviation in the narrative.

ACTRESS: (A warning.) I abhor melodramatics.

LANE: As well you might.

ACTRESS: Almost as much as I detest spontaneity.

LANE: Nothing for you to worry your pretty head about.

ACTRESS: I intend to file a grievance with Actor's Equity.

LANE: (Nervous about the music.) Which violation in particular?

ACTRESS: Production values.

LANE: If you refer to-

ACTRESS: (Pretended innocence.) Music?

LANE: There's an perfectly good explanation-

ACTRESS: I am referring to the shabby set-

LANE: (Relieved.) Hopefully the moonlight will minimize-

ACTRESS: (Stopping dead in her tracks.) No moon.

LANE: But considering what's to transpire here tonight-

ACTRESS: No moon.

LANE: The moon is symbolic.

ACTRESS: (Nicely.) No moon.

LANE: It's your show.

ACTRESS: You bet your sweet ass it is.

(The ACTRESS exits upstage right to change into her SALOME costume as BILL enters from the scene dock with a pedestal.)

BILL: (As he enters.) Where do you want this?

LANE: The Holy Perch. Hand it to me. Reverently.

(BILL gives the pedestal to LANE and exits to the scene dock.)

LANE: (Placing the pedestal.) What else is back there?

BILL: (Off-stage.) Not much. Lanterns...a box of empty bottles...the furniture for Act Two...some kind of a—ouch!—hatchet-

LANE: The headsman's axe.

BILL: (Off-stage.) Sharp S.O.B. (Continuing his inventory.) -croquet mallets...a cannon...the sphinx-

LANE: The summerhouse!

BILL: (Off-stage.) What's it look like?

LANE: Large...

BILL: (Off-stage.) No.

LANE: Octagon...

BILL: (Off-stage.) Nope.

LANE: Overwrought with wicker.

BILL: (Off-stage.) Not back here.

LANE: We can not possibly proceed without it.

(GLADYS enters downstage left.)

GLADYS: You butler's slay me. You take everything so seriously.

LANE: Have you forgotten the importance of the summerhouse. (Indicating the back of the auditorium.) It must stand there at the bottom of the garden.

GLADYS: Fake it.

LANE: Misrepresent?

GLADYS: (To BILL, off-stage.) Bill, what's back there by way of a substitute?

BILL: (Off-stage.) The box of bottles?

LANE: Keep rummaging.

BILL: (Off-stage.) Hey, guess what I found?

GLADYS: What?

BILL: (Off-stage.) The moon.

LANE: No moon.

GLADYS: Yes!

LANE: No.

GLADYS: (To BILL, off-stage.) Bill, bring it here.

LANE: (To BILL, off-stage.) William, the lanterns?

GLADYS: (To LANE.) I'm very partial to moonlight.

LANE: No whimsy.

GLADYS: I'll keep it out of sight.

(BILL enters from the scene dock with a carton of Chinese lanterns which he places on the floor. He exits back to the scene dock for the ladder.)

GLADYS: Please, Lane, for me?

LANE: We've been specifically instructed to exclude it.

GLADYS: (Furious.) Just you remember one thing, a maid never forgets. Never ever. Not in a thousand years.

(SIR HEROD enters from the wings dressed as a dandy of the period.)

HEROD: (To LANE, as he enters.) Everything is-?

GLADYS: (Peeved.) Hunky dory.

HEROD: Unfortunately, I must go out.

LANE: (Crossing to the costume rack.) Before dinner, milord?

HEROD: A deranged sodomist is running amuck, pillaging the womenfolk.

GLADYS: (Gleefully.) A sodomist?

LANE: (Doubtful.) The womenfolk?

HEROD: This deviant undid the dignity of my sister. He also sold her some bum goods.

LANE: (Gathering HEROD's cape, cap and cane.) Shouldn't your usual womanizer want to have—if only as a point of departure—some interest in women?

HEROD: Who can say with certainty just where sexual misdirection will ultimately lead a chap?

(BILL enters with a ladder and begins hanging the lanterns.)

GLADYS: (Out for revenge.) Suppose, Lane, you were the pervert in question.

HEROD: (Reconstructing the crime.) Yes, there you are, loitering in the twilight of the street of no return-

LANE: I stay off the streets.

GLADYS: (Joining in.) -genetically you're unbalanced.

LANE: (Conscious of BILL.) Still waiting for the lab report on that.

HEROD: A product of improper toilet training.

LANE: Leave my sainted mother out of this.

GLADYS: A paucity of adequate role models.

LANE: Pseudopsychological hogwash foisted on the gullible public by a Viennese quack with a marked tendency toward misogyny.

HEROD: The moon is full.

LANE: (A throwaway.) No moon.

HEROD: (A throwaway.) No moon?

GLADYS: (A throwaway.) Ain't it a cheat?

HEROD: (To LANE, resuming the reconstruction.) You are transfigured by lust.

LANE: Not in recent memory.

GLADYS: Possessed of unbridled passion.

LANE: Perhaps in the privacy of my pantry.

HEROD: In short, you're horny.

LANE: Mildly aroused.

GLADYS: (An evangelist.) Moloch has entered unto you.

HEROD: He walks with you-

GLADYS: -and he talks with you-

HEROD: -urging you ever onward to your moral martyrdom.

GLADYS: Your carnal comeuppance.

HEROD: Your auto de fe.

LADY H: (Suddenly appearing from the wings.) Me!

GLADYS: Lady Herodias.

HEROD: Innocently coming the back way through the streets.

LADY H: A vessel of consternation.

GLADYS: (To LANE.) Your cup runneth over.

LANE: (Helping HEROD into his cape.) Poppycock.

HEROD: It only remains for me to catch the culprit.

LADY H: I'll identify him.

LANE: You didn't see him.

GLADYS: When you've seen one, you've seen 'em all.

LADY H: He'll be charged with perversity! With playing footsy with the wrong feet. With...with mimeography!

(LADY H exits stage left.)

HEROD: I pity the poor chap his punishment.

LANE: Will it be severe?

HEROD: (With foreboding.) Civilized.

(GLADYS and LANE shudder at the thought.)

HEROD: (Instructing LANE for later, a complete change of tone.) Devotions first, I think. Here in the garden-

LANE: The Holy Perch is in place.

HEROD: -then inside for dinner and (Suggestively.) out again for the...er...the...

LANE: (Hopefully.) A nice rubber of bridge?

HEROD: Don't be preposterous.

LANE: (Resigned.) Ravel.

GLADYS: Digitally remastered.

HEROD: The phonograph record...I want to hold it...feel it...fondle its grooves.

LANE: (Handing HEROD his deerstalkers cap.) First things first, milord.

HEROD: (To GLADYS.) When my niece does begin to...er...

GLADYS: Trip the light fantastic?

HEROD: You might slip out to the lobby and lock the doors. We wouldn't want the guardians of public morality-

LANE: (Handing HEROD his walking stick.) The Vice Squad's been taken care off.

HEROD: (Starting up the aisle through the audience.) Should I not return-

GLADYS: -your understudy's in the bar across the way-

LANE: -standing by.

HEROD: (From the aisle.) I have my sword stick.

(SIR HEROD exits through the lobby in pursuit of the sodomist as GLADYS and LANE wave him on his way.)

GLADYS: Tallyho.

LANE: (To GLADYS, through gritted teeth.) "Suppose, Lane, you were the pervert in question?"

GLADYS: I'll in and finish the dusting.

(GLADYS makes a hasty exit stage right.)

LANE: (Muttering to himself as he crosses to the costume rack.) The wrong music...no summer-house...a dubious gramophone...fractious fairies making spectacles of themselves on the public thoroughfares..(Reminiscing to BILL, as he puts on his butler's livery.)...

BILL: Can I help?

LANE: Sweet of you, William, to offer. Perhaps during the interval. (Calling to the light booth.) Gary, kill the worklights and bring up dimmers one...eight...nine...and five..(The light booth complies.)..and check the gel on the decapitation special. The severed head's been looking overly lurid. (To BILL.) As for us, there is naught we can do but hope. And see to the escargot.

(LANE exits behind the house flat taking the costume rack as GLADYS peeks around the stage right flat.)

GLADYS: (To BILL.) Pssst!?

BILL: Me?

GLADYS: (Still making mischief.) Lane did it.

BILL: Did what?

GLADYS: (Entering.) Lane is the man with the ink stained hand.

BILL: You mean he's the sodo-whatchamacallit?

GLADYS: He used an alias.

BILL: Lane?

GLADYS: That's also an alias.

BILL: (Uncertain.) Naw.

GLADYS: (Blocking him.) Thanks to him the entire deus ex machina is in dire jeopardy.

BILL: Figured something was up.

GLADYS: Later tonight Sir Herod will draw Miss Salome aside. She will finger her tassels, he will clear his throat, she will tap her toe...

BILL: (So what.) Yeah?

GLADYS: Absolute darkness.

BILL: So?

GLADYS: You try constructing a seduction without moonlight.

BILL: (Shocked.) Touching and stuff?

GLADYS: Complete with X-rated choreography.

BILL: This Miss Salome-?

GLADYS: -is being lead down the garden path. Minus the atmospheric lighting.

BILL: Somebody should warn her.

GLADYS: (Hinting.) Pity this play hasn't a hero.

BILL: I volunteer.

GLADYS: (Pretending surprise.) You?

BILL: Why not?

GLADYS: You're only a secondary story line.

BILL: I'll pad my part.

GLADYS: They'll throw you in the summerhouse.

BILL: We didn't put up the summerhouse.

GLADYS: (Indicating the back of the auditorium.) The summerhouse is there at the end of the garden where it's always been.

BILL: (Astonished.) But how did it...?

GLADYS: (Pleased with herself.) Always remember, Gladys is your friend.

BILL: (Fascinated by the sudden appearance of the summerhouse.) If you say so.

GLADYS: Always remember, Lane is not your friend.

BILL: (Confused.) But-

GLADYS: What I just confided in you?

BILL: About the damsel in distress?

GLADYS: Mull it over, Galahad.

(GLADYS starts to exit upstage right.)

BILL: Miss Gladys, ma'am, wait!

(BILL makes a hurried exit to the stage left wings to retrieve the moon as a satisfied GLADYS waits.)

(The French doors open revealing MISS SALOME dressed in a high-necked teagown of pale lace sashed and bowed in pink satin. GLADYS sees her and backs to a nervous exit downstage right. BILL returns from the wings with a rusty moon shaped tray.)

BILL: (As he enters.) I know how much you wanted this so I-

(BILL sees MISS SALOME, stops short, instinctively hiding the tray behind his back.)

SALOME: (To the audience as she descends the stairs.) I usually enter side-saddle, riding a giant purple peacock, preceded by a hundred naked Nubians blowing fanfares on long, lovely golden horns. It's very musical.

BILL: (Love at first sight.) I'll bet.

SALOME: Direct me to the garden.

BILL: This is it.

SALOME: I don't much care for it.

BILL: (Backing to the ladder.) Come back when it's finished. There'll be fancy paper lanterns all over the place, there was even gonna be-

SALOME: Are you he?

BILL: "He" who?

SALOME: The degenerate.

BILL: I'm the footman. Bill. (Reconsidering.) William.

SALOME: A degenerate molested mamma today. Uncle Herod's gone out to catch him.

BILL: You're not supposed to know about that.

SALOME: I do know about it.

BILL: (Hiding the tray in the lantern carton.) Figured you must.

SALOME: I know everything.

BILL: Don't be scared.

SALOME: I never am.

BILL: You're safe.

SALOME: Am I?

BILL: I'll protect you.

SALOME: You will?

BILL: (Climbing the ladder.) I work here.

SALOME: So you said.

BILL: (Preening.) I'm responsible for-

SALOME: Hanging the lanterns.

BILL: (Hanging the lanterns.) Among my many other duties.

SALOME: Unskilled labor fascinates me.

BILL: It does?

SALOME: From afar.

BILL: Hanging lanterns is a lot more difficult than it looks.

SALOME: It must be.

BILL: It takes..(Fumbling with a lantern.)

SALOME: Manual dexterity?

BILL: Naw, you just have to be good with your..(Dropping a lantern.)..hands.

SALOME: I admire expertise.

BILL: You won't believe this but my mom has a ceramic lamp by her bed that's the spitting image of you. When I was a kid—before mom met up with my stepdad—I'd crawl in under the cover with her and if I was a good boy-

SALOME: (Bored.) She'd let you touch it?

BILL: (Retrieving the lantern.) Yeah.

SALOME: When do we eat?

BILL: After church.

SALOME: Church?

BILL: Devotions.

SALOME: I'm hungry.

BILL: I'll find Lane.

SALOME: You'll do nothing of the sort.

BILL: But, Miss Salome-

SALOME: I am a nameless woman.

BILL: (Impressed.) You are?

SALOME: And famished.

BILL: I could sneak down to the kitchen.

SALOME: What's down in the kitchen?

BILL: Food.

SALOME: (Interested.) What kind of food?

BILL: I know where they keep the cookies.

SALOME: Forget it.

BILL: I could swipe you a glass of milk.

SALOME: Beef. Pork. Venison.

BILL: They don't feed us that.

SALOME: I wish you were the degenerate.

BILL: You do?

SALOME: (Pointing her finger gun-like at BILL.) I'd take a gun and shoot your head off.

BILL: (Envious.) You got a gun?

SALOME: I'm a girl. Girls don't play with guns.

BILL: Then you couldn't shoot my head off.

SALOME: Then I'd be at your mercy.

BILL: (A fantasy come true.) Just like on TV.

SALOME: You concealed something behind your back.

BILL: (Cautious.) I did?

SALOME: When I made my humble entrance.

BILL: Behind my back?

SALOME: And then you slipped it into that carton when you thought I wasn't looking.

BILL: I didn't...I was just...

SALOME: Is it a secret?

BILL: Sort of.

SALOME: Is it a present?

BILL: Yeah. No. I... (Not sure what to say.)

SALOME: For me?

BILL: For Miss Gladys.

SALOME: Never heard of her.

BILL: You know, the one who does the dusting.

SALOME: (Realizing.) Just plain Gladys.

BILL: Yeah, her.

SALOME: Gladys isn't permitted presents.

BILL: She isn't?

SALOME: (Hinting.) Seems a shame to waste a perfectly good present.

BILL: That's the breaks.

SALOME: I'm partial to presents.

BILL: Who isn't?

SALOME: (About to lose her patience.) You have a superfluous gift on your hands, I haven't been the recipient of a gift in who-knows how long-

BILL: Give it to you?

SALOME: It's a thought.

BILL: You wouldn't want it.

SALOME: How will I know unless I see it?

BILL: (Retrieving the tray.) It's kinda dirty.

SALOME: It's all rusted red.

BILL: (Offering her the tray.) I can clean it off.

SALOME: (Hands behind her back.) Yuck.

BILL: Maybe a Brillo pad.

SALOME: I don't think I like it.

BILL: It's supposed to be the moon.

SALOME: (Recoiling in horror.) Away from me with that. Get rid of it. Now. Dispose of it before it can cause even more damage.

BILL: (Holding the tray like a waiter.) But it's only an old tray.

SALOME: Tray?!! You fool! You idiot!! You...you lunatic!!! (Trying to control herself.) Will dinner be served from that?

BILL: (Laughing.) No. (Less certain.) No.

SALOME: (Sweetly.) Then throw the..(About to say moon..).."tray" away.

BILL: But-

SALOME: I, Salome, order it.

BILL: You-

SALOME: I lost my namelessness.

(BILL hesitates, then throws the tray into the wings.)

SALOME: The whole garden is improved.

BILL: It is?

SALOME: I like you.

BILL: You do?

SALOME: Are all Americans handsome?

BILL: Most.

SALOME: Which tribe are you?

BILL: Tribe? (Laughing.) Oh..."tribe"...no, see-

SALOME: When did you say dinner would be?

BILL: I didn't.

SALOME: Are all Americans retarded?

BILL: I-

SALOME: You're not. You're wonderful.

BILL: (Confused.) I-

SALOME: And you like me, don't you?

BILL: I'm not so sure.

SALOME: Are you trifling with me? Am I some toy for you to play with and then dispose of like you did with the..(Catching herself)..like uncle Herod did with poor mamma?

BILL: I guess I like you.

SALOME: You "guess?"

BILL: You shouldn't be here.

SALOME: Says who?

BILL: Any minute now it all starts to thicken.

SALOME: The plot?

BILL: You said it, sister.

SALOME: What the denouement?

BILL: Say what?

SALOME: Who's the victim?

BILL: You.

SALOME: Me?

BILL: Afraid so.

SALOME: Whatever will I do?

BILL: Hide.

SALOME: Where?

BILL: (Indicating the wings.) Over there...the scene dock-

SALOME: And miss dinner?

BILL: They're conspiring to commit...

SALOME: What?

BILL: (Having difficulty with the word.) Love.

SALOME: In the vernacular?

BILL: Nah, here in the garden.

SALOME: And all the time I was under the impression it was only dinner with maybe a drink or two after.

BILL: We can escape.

SALOME: To America?

BILL: Mom'll love you.

SALOME: I intend to report you.

BILL: Report me?

SALOME: To uncle Herod. For speaking to me.

BILL: You talked to me first.

SALOME: Prove it.

BILL: You like me.

SALOME: Fat chance.

BILL: But you said-

SALOME: I also intend to report your larceny.

BILL: Larceny?

SALOME: You attempted to pawn off on me a glass of burgled milk.

BILL: You're nuts.

SALOME: I also intend to report your vandalism. You deliberately destroyed property belonging to the house of Herod.

BILL: I did not.

SALOME: Willfully did you discard of a precious Mesopotamian tray, middle period, one of a matched pair.

BILL: You ordered it.

SALOME: Unlikely.

BILL: It wasn't precious.

SALOME: Irreplaceable.

BILL: It was all rusted red.

SALOME: Terra cotta.

BILL: I'll go find it.

SALOME: You have not been dismissed.

BILL: You didn't mean what you said.

SALOME: What did I say?

BILL: About-

SALOME: Liking you?

BILL: Yeah.

SALOME: Dare you say I didn't mean it. I like you. I like all footmen. And I am grateful you warned me. Although you were mistaken. Never was the victim meant to be me.

(The lights fade as MISS SALOME exits through the French doors.)

Act Two

(The lanterns are hung, the Holy Perch is strung with garlands, the fake phono sits on a pedestal. A white wicker table waits off to the side.)

(Down the aisle comes a religious procession. MISS SALOME leads, scattering purple flower petals. She has replaced her pink sash with one of blood red. GLADYS follows, clanging diminutive cymbals. She now wears a frilly apronette and frou-frou. Next comes LANE, coped in the ritual robes of a high priest of Moloch. He wears a mask depicting the more vicious visage of the God. BILL follows, sheltering LANE with the Holy Umbrella. He wears an alter boy's surplice over his Levis. Last is LADY HERODIAS, mater dolorosa, rosary clenched in her folded hands. She has changed into a scarlet evening dress of decadent décolletage.)

LANE: (As they come down the aisle.) Blessed be Moloch.

THE OTHERS: Blessed be Moloch.

LANE: Blessed be Bush the Belligerent.

THE OTHERS: Scourge of Saddam Hussein!

LANE: Blessed be Big Barbara.

THE OTHERS: Mother of Bionics.

LANE: Blessed be their begotten son.

THE OTHERS: Little Georgie.

LANE: Defender of the Profit Motive.

THE OTHERS: Avenging sword of the oil cartels!.

LANE: Blessed be the Holy Ghost of the National Rifle Association.

THE OTHERS: Bang, bang.

(The procession reaches the stage. LANE officiates in front of the Holy Perch. The others prostate themselves according to their faith.)

LANE: Mighty Moloch of repression-

(As LANE intones, the others repeat.)

LANE: Deliver us from objectivity. Deliver us from self-analysis. Deliver us from secular humanism. Deliver us from retroactive abortion. Deliver the disciples of abortion unto capitol punishment.

THE OTHERS: For such is the right to life.

LANE: Protect and defend family values.

GLADYS: (With evangelical fervor.) Praised be the missionary position!

LANE: Protect and defend us from marauding mimeographers.

LADY H: Drive some nails in that closet door!

LANE: Protect and defend Thy man children. Make them strong of limb, red of blood, with narrow waists and broad shoulders and tattoos of panthers running up and down their hairy forearms-

GLADYS: (Trying to restrain him.) Er...Lane...?

LANE: (Unheeding.) -endow them with bountiful genitalia straining the seams of their sweat stained athletic supporters-

LADY H: Lane.

LANE: (Coming out of his rapture.) What? Oh...yes...sorry..(Perfunctorily)..as for girls, make them submissive, feminine and good homemakers.

SALOME: (Under her breath.) For Christ's sake.

LANE: For Thine is the kingdom-

GLADYS: -and the power-

ALL: -and the glory.

LADY H: (Flagellating herself with her rosary.) Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.

(They start to rise.)

LANE: And-

(They return to their knees.)

LANE: -omnipotent Moloch, protect and defend Sir Herod, K.C.B., who has yet to return from the darkness of Thy night and the uncertainty of Thy streets.

(They rise. LANE places the mask of Moloch on the Holy Perch.)

SALOME: When do we eat?

LADY H: With Herod lost, gone, never to return?

GLADYS: Sure puts a crimp in the climax.

LANE: Gladys, away to the greenhouse.

LADY H: (To GLADYS.) Pick a brave bouquet.

(GLADYS exits upstage left behind the house.)

BILL: (Shedding the surplice.) Shouldn't we call the cops?

LADY H: And disturb their slumber?

LANE: (To BILL.) The garden chairs?

(BILL exits downstage right.)

SALOME: I'm going in.

LADY H: You'll stay put until dinner is served.

LANE: (Formally.) Dinner is served.

LADY H: Perhaps that's for the best.

(LADY HERODIAS and MISS SALOME exit through the French doors as GLADYS enters from upstage left with a bouquet of exaggerated flowers.)

GLADYS: (As she enters.) If there was any money in the family, I'd say the old boy absconded.

LANE: (Placing the table stage center.) Unless he actually apprehended the miscreant-

GLADYS: -and they're hot at it in a motel somewhere.

(SIR HEROD enters down the aisle, his costume disheveled, his swordstick bent.)

HEROD: (In the aisle.) Have I missed devotions?

GLADYS: Milord, you're safe.

HEROD: (Climbing onto the stage.) Barely.

LANE: You caught the culprit?

HEROD: I caught someone.

GLADYS: You're not positive if it's the deviant in question?

HEROD: It was getting dark, I had to take what I could find.

(BILL enters downstage right with two wicker garden chairs.)

LANE: He confessed?

HEROD: Poor chap, he didn't seem to know what was happening to him.

GLADYS: I'll off to the ladies with the glad tidings.

(GLADYS exits through the French doors.)

HEROD: (To LANE.) They're already at the table?

LANE: (Arranging the flowers in a vase.) They're already in the aspic.

HEROD: (Starting for the French doors.) Keep an eye on the summerhouse.

LANE: You locked him in there?

HEROD: You might see that he has fresh water.

(SIR HEROD exits through the French doors.)

LANE: (As a cue.) Now it all begins.

BILL: (Putting an 18th century livery coat over his T-shirt.) I don't understand.

LANE: You're not expected to. (Repeating the cue.) Now it all begins.

BILL: He caught the wrong man?

LANE: It is never the wrong man. (Repeating the cue.) Now it all begins.

(GLADYS enters from downstage left, a champagne glass in hand.)

GLADYS: (Referring to the flowers.) What lovely expositions and how nicely you are arranging them.

LANE: You missed your cue.

GLADYS: (Giving the glass to LANE.) Here's the first champagne glass.

(GLADYS exits downstage right.)

LANE: (Calling after GLADYS.) One glass? Surely you're not planning to bring them on one at a time.

BILL: Lane is your real name, isn't it?

LANE: Whatever do you mean?

BILL: It isn't an alias, is it?

LANE: William, have you been smoking the flora?

BILL: (Attaching a lace jabot around his neck.) I'm getting mighty suspicious.

LANE: (Referring to GLADYS.) As am I.

BILL: (TV tough guy.) You and me, we need to talk.

LANE: And we shall. Later.

BILL: Man to man.

LANE: Absolutely.

BILL: Now.

LANE: You do pick the most inconvenient times.

(GLADYS enters from downstage left, a second champagne glass in hand.)

GLADYS: (Giving the glass to LANE.) Here is the second champagne glass.

(GLADYS exits downstage right.)

LANE: (Calling after GLADYS.) Stop making entrances if you're not intending to play the scene.

BILL: (To LANE.) There's something fishy going on around here.

LANE: Only the caviar.

BILL: Look, pal, let's lay our cards on the table.

LANE: You first.

BILL: I'm onto you.

LANE: Are you?

BILL: I know all about the whole conspiracy.

LANE: (Alarmed.) Which conspiracy in particular?

BILL: The garden path...the missing moonlight...the distressed damsel-

LANE: (Calling offstage right.) Gladys, get out here!

BILL: I figured it out all by myself.

LANE: Cunning of you.

BILL: When I took this job, I didn't know I'd be implicated in a...in a...

LANE: Love scene?

BILL: If the folks back home find out...well, it'd kill mom.

LANE: It's not your love scene.

BILL: There's guilt by association.

LANE: Nobody invited you to associate.

BILL: I can't just stand by a watch it happen.

LANE: (An attempt at damage control.) Trust me, William, tonight-

(GLADYS enters from downstage left, a third champagne glass in hand.)

GLADYS: (As she enters.) -is fraught with significance. Farce fencing force over tea, tragedy triumphantly tripping through the petit fours, life leaping over the Christopher Wren balustrade, cucumber sandwich in hand. (To the audience.) This moment of purple prose was brought to you by Exxon in hopes that a nice smear of culture will keep your mind off the mess they're making of the environment.

LANE: What have you been telling William?

GLADYS: (Giving the glass to LANE.) Here is the third and final champagne glass.

(GLADYS exits downstage right.)

LANE: (Calling after GLADYS.) Gladys?! (To BILL, fearing the worst.) This "conspiracy theory" of yours, has it had wide circulation?

BILL: Miss Salome, but only to warn her.

LANE: "Warn her?"

BILL: She was to be the victim.

LANE: "Was to be?"

(LADY HERODIAS enters through the French doors, napkin and fork in hand.)

LADY H: I slipped away from the table unnoticed.

LANE: There's a revolt brewing among the footmen.

LADY H: Squelch it. The film-?

LANE: (Handing the red feathered fan to LADY H.) -is in the camera.

LADY H: (Pleased.) And the camera is hidden in the handle of the fan! How fortunate for us you've had such wide experience with blackmail.

LANE: (Conscious of BILL.) Milady-

LADY H: When my cad of a brother debauches my diffident daughter, we document the whole unsavory episode with my handy Instamatic and you and I are set for life.

BILL: Blackmail?

LADY H: Faithful family retainers and faded females of fashion must fend for themselves as best as they can.

(LADY HERODIAS exits through the French doors.)

BILL: (Disgusted.) Her own daughter.

LANE: You're to stay out of this.

(GLADYS enters downstage left with a small silver tray on which are bags that look as if they might contain tea.)

GLADYS: (Giving the tray to LANE.) Here are the champagne bags.

LANE: (As he exits offstage right.) Pity, she was a great maid in her day.

BILL: (Impressed.) You were in show business?

GLADYS: (Including the audience.) If only you could have been there for my debut. Oh, I'd had some experience...a bit of dusting in Act One, answering the phone in Act Two...but this was my first big break...my first big formal sit-down dinner. There were many, many courses, but the entrance was soup. Back in the wings I stood, soup in hand. Pea soup in hand. Split pea soup in hand. I tried to concentrate. To prepare. What is soup? What is the essence of soup? What the social implications? What would Stanislavski say? I tried to recall my earliest encounter with soup. Soup de jour. Soup kitchens. Mother's soup. This soup, here, now, in the tureen I saw before me. How did I feel about this soup? How did this soup feel about me? I stepped out into the golden, fervent light. I paused. I took one step...my thoughts racing back...another step...back to years of study...another step...hard years...step...sad years...step...making the rounds...step...parts I never got...step...dinners I never served...step...years that brought me here...step...tonight...step...would they like me...step...would they understand...step...would I ever get there...step...once I got there...step...would they like the soup? I put the soup on the table. Next day I came down with hepatitis and had to leave the show.

(GLADYS exits downstage right almost colliding with LANE who enters carrying a champagne bucket in a stand.)

BILL: (To LANE.) What happened to theatre?

LANE: Died, in your country, from overeating.

GLADYS: (Popping her head out from the downstage right wings.) Something tingling with excitement is about to take place.

LANE: (Taking his position by the French doors.) William, to your post.

BILL: Here's the plan. I need a helicopter, a fast car—the kind that converts into a speed boat, some plastic explosives, an Uzi, a cigarette lighter that is really a top secret anti-satellite device. You cause a diversion, I grab the girl, we make a run for it.

LANE: You'll do nothing of the sort.

BILL: But-

LANE: To your post.

(BILL reluctantly takes his position.)

LANE: (Announcing.) The honorable Miss Salome.

(The Chinese lanterns flare, the French doors fling open, MISS SALOME stands in the doorway.)

SALOME: Not a very good dinner, no potatoes.

BILL: You're in danger.

SALOME: Lane, restrain your minion.

LANE: (To BILL, warning.) William.

SALOME: How dark it is tonight.

LANE: You gave specific instructions-

SALOME: Let's get cracking around here. Let us commence the festivities. Let there be music!

BILL: No!

SALOME: Lane, I asked for music.

LANE: I...er...your mamma...we-

SALOME: The footman's right. We want quietude. Save the violins for later.

LANE: (Under his breath.) Not to mention the snare drums.

SALOME: Why is the door to the summerhouse locked?

LANE: Is it, miss? I hadn't noticed.

SALOME: I have every confidence in you, Lane.

LANE: I have even greater confidence in you.

SALOME: That's something a footman can't be expected to understand.

BILL: You gotta listen to me-

SALOME: Can you see me?

BILL: (Unsure.) Yes.

SALOME: What do you see?

BILL: What should I see?

SALOME: An innocent lamb being lead to slaughter?

BILL: Yeah!

SALOME: Never again are you to see me as mutton. Lamb is mutton. To be served. I am not a lamb. I am not a sea gull. I am not a wild duck. Nor the Christmas goose. I am none of those symbolic animals. I am a little girl. A shy little girl. Unworldly, undemanding, desperately in need of a drink.

LANE: The water is icing.

SALOME: That hardly satisfies my thirst.

(As LANE starts for the bell pull, GLADYS enters downstage left with a pitcher of ice water.)

GLADYS: You rang?

LANE: (Taking the pitcher from GLADYS.) I would have.

(GLADYS exits downstage right. During the following speech, LANE fills a champagne glass with water.)

SALOME: Why must everyone complicate everything? Mamma and "uncle" Herod sit in there all hunched over the Queen Anne table, puffing on their panatellas, scribbling figures and percentages and prorates on the damask and haggling, haggling, haggling. Do they care about me? Do they consider my feelings? They toss and throw me back and forth like dice.

(LANE brings the glass and a champagne bag to MISS SALOME.)

SALOME: (Reading the tag on the champagne bag.) A good year. A very good year. Disappointing country. (Dunking the champagne bag in the glass of water.) Why is it so difficult to find a good year and a decent country in the same bag? I recall...was it Rome? Carthage? No, that odd island in the Aegean where those martial ladies kept that athletic girls school—he's locked in the summerhouse, isn't he?

LANE: Who, miss?

SALOME: Don't dissemble.

LANE: The prophet?

SALOME: Prophet?

LANE: Meant to say prisoner.

SALOME: Pervert.

LANE: Has that been proven?

SALOME: The "alleged" pervert. Mamma's friend. The guy with the leaflets...locked in the summer house.

LANE: I wouldn't know.

SALOME: You would know.

LANE: Drink your wine.

SALOME: (To LANE.) Let him out.

LANE: (To SALOME.) Impossible.

BILL: (To LANE.) Forget the fast car-

SALOME: (To LANE.) Liberate the libertine.

BILL: (To LANE.) -a bicycle will do.

LANE: Might we return to the plot at hand?

SALOME: Let him out.

LANE: No.

SALOME: Release him.

LANE: Impossible.

BILL: Miss Salome, please, no-

SALOME: Let the misogynist out!

BILL: For your protection-

SALOME: (Laughing.) My protection?

LANE: -his protection, then.

BILL: He's dangerous.

SALOME: (To BILL.) Surely you can protect me from a sissy. (To LANE.) Are you making me wait? I don't like to wait. When I wait, I become bored...when I become bored, I tend to look less than ravishing...Lane, I am not looking pretty. I'm very insecure, Lane. When I have reason to doubt my allure, I become nasty. Very nasty.

GLADYS: Maids never open doors, so don't ask me.

SALOME: What do you mean maids never open doors?

GLADYS: It's an Equity rule.

SALOME: Any hand that dusts a table can open the door to the summer house.

GLADYS: Shows how much you know.

SALOME: Your fingers itch for that handle.

(GLADYS hides her hands behind her.)

SALOME: You're simply pagan with door opening tendencies.

GLADYS: No!

SALOME: Solidarity, sister, sorority.

GLADYS: Unfair!

SALOME: As one woman to another-

GLADYS: Never!

LANE: Brava, Gladys.

GLADYS: I almost weakened. I don't often get included in the female gender.

(GLADYS exits USR)

SALOME: Bill?

LANE: (Warning.) William-

SALOME: Brave Bill.

BILL: No way.

SALOME: Manly Bill. Tomorrow, at high tea, when I make my humble entrance, walking, without the benefit of naked trumpeters, I shall smile. That smile, Bill...blue eyed, blonding Bill...shall be for you.

BILL: I won't open that door.

SALOME: I might even drop my glove.

BILL: (Weakening.) Your glove?

SALOME: You can retrieve it for me.

BILL: (To LANE.) Her glove?

SALOME: My white, right glove.

LANE: (Warning.) William-

SALOME: Both gloves!

BILL: I can keep them?

SALOME: You may do with them as you please. Whatever you please. Wherever you please. With whatever pleases you.

LANE: And you'll grow hair on the palm of your hand.

SALOME: Butt out, Lane.

BILL: Both gloves?

SALOME: And one stocking.

(BILL jumps from the stage, hurries up the aisle to the summer house.)

LANE: (To BILL.) No, stay away from that door!

SALOME: (To LANE.) You may leave us.

LANE: You wish.

SALOME: Ten minutes alone with him.

LANE: I'd rather watch.

SALOME: A voyeur.

LANE: An innocent bystander.

SALOME: Five minutes. I'll make it worth your while.

LANE: The other stocking?

(BILL leads the PRISONER down the aisle. The PRISONER's hands are bound behind him with raw-hide, his shirt is torn. He is an attractive, personable, contemporary gay male, dressed for Saturday night on West Street.)

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) Hello...come up here...pay no mind to the functionaries..

(The PRISONER and BILL are on the stage.)

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) ..watch your step...here...come...sit down. (To BILL.) Thank you, William, that will be all. (To the PRISONER.) Hello.

PRISONER: Where am I?

SALOME: Sit down.

PRISONER: I'll stand.

SALOME: You'll sit.

PRISONER: What's going on here?

SALOME: You must be shaky.

PRISONER: Why are my hands tied?

SALOME: You look shaky.

PRISONER: What the fuck's going on here?

BILL: Watch your language!

SALOME: Your hands are trembling. Is the rawhide too tight?

PRISONER: Is this some kind of a game?

SALOME: Game?

PRISONER: A fantasy trip with me as the sex object?

SALOME: You want to play games? (To LANE.) Set up the hoops. (To the PRISONER.) I challenge you to croquet.

PRISONER: Unreal.

SALOME: Would you prefer badminton?

PRISONER: Is this a garden?

SALOME: Are you a horticulturist?

PRISONER: This must be a dream.

SALOME: Are you asleep?

PRISONER: Or a bad trip. Sure, that's it! You're one lude too many.

SALOME: Are you an addict?

PRISONER: Not after this.

SALOME: Already I've influenced your rehabilitation.

PRISONER: This is a stage, isn't it?

SALOME: Are you an actor?

PRISONER: I seem to be under arrest.

SALOME: What did you do?

PRISONER: I'm innocent.

SALOME: Of what?

PRISONER: How should I know?

SALOME: You don't know why you're here?

PRISONER: I don't know where I am.

SALOME: Will that be your defense?

PRISONER: Then this is a jail?

SALOME: Did you do it?

PRISONER: No, I did not.

SALOME: What didn't you do?

PRISONER: I was innocently walking along West Street-

SALOME: I thought you people called it cruising.

PRISONER: Right...it's funny...I'm laughing..(To LANE.)..Is there a telephone here?

SALOME: I said sit down. No? Stand, do precisely as you please. Should you wish to sit down, these are chairs. Lane, function, give our guest some champagne.

PRISONER: No thanks.

BILL: (To SALOME) Want me to put him away now?

SALOME: Fine, don't have champagne. (To LANE.) I'll have some, he can share from my glass.

(LANE takes glass, refills it.)

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) My name's Salome.

PRISONER: (To LANE.) I asked to use a telephone.

SALOME: And you?

PRISONER: Me what?

SALOME: Your name.

PRISONER: (To BILL) Where's the phone?

BILL: Come near me, I'll bust you in the face!

SALOME: Are you a phone freak?

PRISONER: I'm allowed one phone call.

SALOME: Why won't you tell me your name?

PRISONER: (To BILL.) Untie me.

BILL: No.

PRISONER: Why not?

BILL: You're a prisoner.

PRISONER: Am I? It seems I am. I'm not sure I know what kind of jail this is.

SALOME: You've had experience with incarceration?

PRISONER: Only on pig night at the Lure.

SALOME: If I loosen your bondage, will you tell me your name?

PRISONER: Try it and find out.

SALOME: (Untying him.) Our only interest is making you comfortable.

PRISONER: (To LANE.) What are you supposed to be? The butler?

LANE: On occasion.

PRISONER: I've seen you somewhere before.

LANE: (Uncomfortable.) It's hardly likely.

PRISONER: Sure ... some piss elegant bar on the Upper East Side-

LANE: You're mistaken.

PRISONER: (To LANE.) Ah ... yes ... I understand.

LANE: I would prefer you didn't.

PRISONER: (To BILL.) What are you supposed to be?

BILL: I warned you once.

PRISONER: I'm only being friendly.

BILL: I know what you are.

PRISONER: You're not enjoying this as much as she is.

BILL: You ready to go back now?

PRISONER: (To BILL.) Want to tell me what this is all about?

SALOME: Are you ignoring me?

PRISONER: I'm talking to him.

SALOME: You're talking to me.

PRISONER: (To BILL.) They won't let you talk?

SALOME: He can talk. Talk William.

PRISONER: William? Bill? Which do you prefer?

LANE: He seems to have nothing to say.

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) And your name?

PRISONER: Any name will do.

SALOME: Are you ashamed of your name?

PRISONER: (To LANE.) You seem to be the power behind the throne here-

LANE: Don't include me in this.

PRISONER: It may be too late.

LANE: For you.

PRISONER: We're in this together.

LANE: How naive.

PRISONER: Each man for himself?

BILL: (With contempt.) Ha!

PRISONER: (To BILL.) What name would you like me to have?

SALOME: Name yourself!

PRISONER: I am Iokanaan. (Optional substitute: John the Baptist)

SALOME: Don't be irreligious.

PRISONER: Alexander the Great?

SALOME: Don't be pretentious.

PRISONER: Achilles.

SALOME: Such self-delusions.

PRISONER: Antinous?

SALOME: You aren't cute enough.

PRISONER: Richard the-

SALOME: Wasn't lion-hearted in the least. He was a sniveling little-

PRISONER: Socrates.

SALOME: Are you going to trot them all out? Michelangelo? Marlowe? Bacon? Shakespeare?

LANE: How about Hortio Alger?

PRISONER: How about George Washington?

BILL: Watch it!

PRISONER: Sorry, Bill.

SALOME: You're not shocking me.

PRISONER: (To LANE.) I'll have that drink now.

SALOME: Lane, champagne.

PRISONER: I'd rather have a beer.

LANE: Budweiser?

PRISONER: Sure.

SALOME: We still haven't settled on your name.

PRISONER: Alfred Taylor.

SALOME: Is that your real name?

PRISONER: No, but it'll do.

(LANE brings the wine bucket and stand to the table, removes a can of Bud, serves it to the PRISONER without a glass.)

SALOME: I don't like it.

PRISONER: Sorry.

SALOME: I shall call you Bruce.

PRISONER: (To LANE.) I want out of here.

SALOME: So you can hurry back to the old G.D.F.?

PRISONER: Fifth amendment.

SALOME: You know mamma. You met her on the street today.

PRISONER: I stay off the streets.

SALOME: I thought you were innocently walking along West Street-

PRISONER: Nope.

SALOME: Because you were cruising and you aren't innocent. Oh, you didn't do anything to mamma, nobody ever does anymore. Maybe you gave her a leaflet. But you are in no way innocent.

PRISONER: Certain of that?

SALOME: I know one when I see one.

PRISONER: One what?

SALOME: What you are.

PRISONER: What am I?

SALOME: I don't blame you for being ashamed of it.

PRISONER: I'm not.

SALOME: Humiliated?

PRISONER: No.

SALOME: You disgust decent people.

PRISONER: No more than they disgust me.

SALOME: Who do you think you are?! (To LANE.) Lane, tell Bruce the story about the pederast and-

PRISONER: (Wearily.) -the Boy Scout?

LANE: (To SALOME.) I don't think he's interested.

SALOME: Tell him!

LANE: To earn his merit badge for fishing, the Boy Scout went hiking backwards through the bus station with his fly unbuttoned-

PRISONER: (with pained patience.) -trolling for queers.

LANE: (To SALOME.) He may have already heard it.

SALOME: (Enjoying the PRISONER's discomfort.) Then tell him the one about the fluff who fell in love with the handsome doctor-

PRISONER: (His patience strained.) -who specialized in disorders of the alimentary canal.

LANE: (To SALOME.) I'd really rather not.

SALOME: Lane?

LANE: This is hardly the place or time-

SALOME: Tell him!

LANE: (Not comfortable.) The fluff flitted into the surgery of the handsome doctor complaining of a blockage. The doctor extended his arm some distance up the orifice in question where indeed he did encounter an impediment, which the doctor extracted, which, to his amazement,. was one dozen long stemmed red roses, to which the fluff said-

PRISONER: (With carefully constrained rage.) "Read the card."

BILL: I don't get it! Was something written on the card?

PRISONER: (Referring to LANE.) Have him explain it to you.

SALOME: I'll bet you'd love to get your hands on my coiffure.

PRISONER: No.

SALOME: Want to decorate my apartment?

PRISONER: No.

SALOME: Want to wear one of my dresses?

PRISONER: I doubt it'll fit.

SALOME: Lane, put some Bette Midler on the boombox. (Update accordingly.)

PRISONER: Enjoying yourself?

SALOME: You and I seem to have gotten off on the wrong foot. You were innocently cruising...excuse me...walking along West Street-

PRISONER: I was at home.

SALOME: Whose home?

PRISONER: In bed.

SALOME: With whom?

PRISONER: Alone.

SALOME: You people live such lonely lives, don't you? No, forget I said that. I don't know what makes me say things like that. I'm not spiteful by nature. (To the audience.) Really, I'm not. (To the PRISONER.) You were at home, alone, in bed-

PRISONER: You got it.

SALOME: You lie! Herod would never take you in your own home.

PRISONER: He didn't even knock.

BILL: He should have kicked your door in!

PRISONER: He did!

BILL: Good for him!

PRISONER: I was beaten.

SALOME: With what?

BILL: A baseball bat?!

PRISONER: A golf club.

SALOME: Herod wouldn't hurt a fly.

PRISONER: He hurt me.

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) Did you bleed?

PRISONER: Yes.

SALOME: Badly?

PRISONER: Yes.

SALOME: I don't see any blood.

PRISONER: They cleaned me up.

LANE: They cleaned you up?

PRISONER: When they found out I was coming up here.

LANE: People only get hurt when they deserve it.

PRISONER: Is that so?

LANE: No one ever clubbed me.

PRISONER: Yet.

LANE: Are you threatening me?

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) No wonder you get hurt.

PRISONER: (To BILL.) Bill, I don't know how you got mixed up in whatever is going on up here. I don't know how I got mixed up in it. I seem to be staying around for a while. You should get your ass out of here.

BILL: My ass ain't any of your business.

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) Why are you so hostile to me?

PRISONER: I'm not.

SALOME: You should be guilt-ridden. Your very existence is a denial of my femininity.

PRISONER: (To BILL.) Look, Bill, I like you-

BILL: You what?!

SALOME: He "likes" you.

BILL: (To the PRISONER.) Take that back! (Making a fist.) I mean it, fruit!

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) William seems to be rejecting you.

BILL: (To the PRISONER.) Come on, fight like a man.

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) Fight like a man, Bruce.

PRISONER: (To BILL.) No.

BILL: You shouldn't say stuff like that, people will get the wrong idea.

PRISONER: Let them.

BILL: (To SALOME.) Please, miss Salome, I did nothing to lead him on.

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) You're proud of what you are, aren't you?

PRISONER: Why not?

LANE: He's probably had his consciousness lifted.

PRISONER: (Correcting.) "Raised"...

LANE: (To SALOME, referring to the PRISONER.) He's probably above compromise.

SALOME: How selfish.

LANE: It's even likely he's dedicated to his own pleasure.

SALOME: Unnatural.

LANE: He fancies himself better than the rest of us.

SALOME: The rest of whom?

LANE: Those of us who prefer the cool, clean, dark air of the closet.

PRISONER: Mothballs and mushrooms.

LANE: I'd rather be standing here, safe and secure in my Gucci's, than stomping around in your boots on a collision with calamity.

SALOME: Closets? What has this to do with closets?

PRISONER: Everything.

LANE: Friend—may I call you friend? Like it or not, maybe we do have a lot in common. We have even more that is not in common. You're committed, I've never found commitment pays my bill at Bloomingdale's. You're an activist, I go to the Opera. You're involved, I rely on opiates.

SALOME: Drugs?

PRISONER: Whatever turns you on.

LANE: Which is to say, whatever turns you off. Personally, I prefer Dewar's.

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) Stop and consider the harm you do. Sodom and Gomorrah, burned to the ground, thanks to you. You and your ilk pushed the Roman Empire over the brink. I've even been told that buggery is the cause of earth-quakes.

PRISONER: Why not throw in gasoline prices?

SALOME: I am concerned for your soul. I offer myself to you as the receptacle of your repentance, the repository of your repudiation-

PRISONER: Fine. I repudiate, I repent, now put me back.

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) Repent what?

PRISONER: Whatever you say.

SALOME: Word of honor?

PRISONER: You allow me honor?

LANE: You should be guilt-ridden.

SALOME: And self-hating.

LANE: (Sweetly.) And self-destructive.

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) What kind of a life do you have?

PRISONER: A life.

SALOME: A life? Is that all?

PRISONER: It's the best place to begin.

SALOME: Without so much as a pardon my dust?

PRISONER: What kind of a life do you have?

SALOME: You think I didn't notice your hair.

PRISONER: What about it?

SALOME: It's long.

PRISONER: (Laughing.) It is not.

SALOME: It isn't a crew cut.

PRISONER: It's my hair.

SALOME: You're free to wear your hair that way.

PRISONER: How liberal of you.

SALOME: I'm free to find it repugnant.

BILL: Me, too.

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) Don't get me wrong, I like you.

BILL: You what?!

LANE: She likes him.

BILL: But...!

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) I said I like you.

PRISONER: (To BILL.) Put me back in the summer house.

SALOME: Lane says you're a prophet.

LANE: Slip of the tongue.

BILL: (To SALOME.) You don't like him, you like me!

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) Give me a prophesy.

PRISONER: (To BILL.) You took me out, put me back.

SALOME: I can see you now, standing in some dark bar somewhere on the waterfront, absolutely convinced you know who you are. Well you don't know who you are. Not until I decide to tell you who you are. I define you. And you're not special at all. Or you won't be, not when I cut your hair-

LANE: (Blocking her.) Wrong play, Miss Salome.

SALOME: (To BILL.) William...Bill...in the drawing room...my sewing kit...the scissors...

LANE: (Restraining SALOME). No!

SALOME: (Struggling to free herself, to BILL.) ...there on the table...the butter knife...give me that knife!...(To LANE.)..unhand me!

(BILL takes a butter knife from the garden table.)

LANE: (Shaking SALOME.) Cool it, Delilah!

SALOME: (Dazed.) I...I..?

LANE: Remember who you are!

SALOME: But...

LANE: Where you are!

SALOME: (Looking around her.) Where...who...?

LANE: You've got the wrong climax going for you.

SALOME: Where are we?

LANE: Not among the Philistines.

(LADY H and HEROD enter laughing through the French doors USC.)

HEROD: Salome, my dear child-

LADY H: -It's all been settled!

HEROD: The contract has been signed-

LADY H: (To SALOME.) -You get everything!

SALOME: It has not been settled. Mamma, Herod, go back inside and wait.

HEROD: But-

LADY H: (To the PRISONER.) Oh...Hello, there...we meet again.

SALOME: (To HEROD and LADY H.) I'm not kidding. Go back off stage and wait.

(LADY H and HEROD exit confused through the French doors USC)

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) Now, sir, come to me.

BILL: No!

SALOME: Yes.

PRISONER: Why?

SALOME: I am your lover.

BILL: No, Miss Salome, me!

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) Look at me!

BILL: Don't fight it, it's you and me.

SALOME: You're the footman.

BILL: I'll go to business school.

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) Sir, as I was saying before we were so rudely interrupted-

BILL: Without you, I'll...I'll...

SALOME: What? Without me you'll what?

BILL: Die.

SALOME: (Laughing.) Silly boy.

LANE: William, don't be a fool!

BILL: I will!

SALOME: Prove it.

BILL: Die?

LANE: I think not.

SALOME: He offered.

PRISONER: (To BILL.) Don't let her manipulate you.

SALOME: It seems his offer was not in good faith.

BILL: (Butter knife in hand.) I will.

PRISONER: (To LANE.) Hadn't you better disarm him?

LANE: Interfere?

BILL: When it's too late, when I'm lying dead on the floor, then you'll appreciate me.

SALOME: Maybe. Maybe not. (To the PRISONER, unbuttoning her bodice.) In years to come, when you talk of this, and you will, be kind.

PRISONER: Bill, give me that knife.

BILL: (To SALOME.) Look at me!

LANE: (Nervous.) William, you'd best leave the theatrics to your elders.

BILL: Look!

(To his own surprise, BILL stabs himself.)

LANE: William!

SALOME: Now what have you done?!

BILL: Stabbed myself.

LANE: (Scandalized.) In the garden?

SALOME: For me?

BILL: For...for... (He collapses.)

LANE: (Catching BILL, cradling him.) William?

PRISONER: Quick, open his shirt!

SALOME: Are you a doctor?

PRISONER: No, but-

SALOME: Then stay out of this-

BILL: (Weakly.) I...You...

SALOME: I what?

BILL: You didn't mean it. (BILL dies.)

PRISONER: (To LANE.) Let me help you.

LANE: (Bitterly.) Haven't you done enough?

PRISONER: You set the stage.

SALOME: (To LANE.) Is he?

LANE: Yes.

(GLADYS enters DSL with a broom and dust pan.)

PRISONER: (The game is over.) Dead?

GLADYS: (As she enters.) You rang?

SALOME: I dropped one of my props.

LANE: And it broke.

SALOME: (Advancing on the PRISONER.) You, Mr. No-name, you should know the poem even better than I..(She quotes).. "But I am love-"

PRISONER: (Backing away from SALOME in disgust.) Love? (He starts back toward the summer-house.)

SALOME: (Quoting.) "-and I was wont to be alone in this fair garden" Say it with me! "I am true love I fill the hearts of boys and girls with mutual flame"

(In her advance on the PRISONER, MISS SALOME daintily steps over the body of BILL.)

GLADYS: (To SALOME.) Your skirt's trailing in the blood.

SALOME: (To the PRISONER.) You're so proud of it, say it with me. "-then sighing, said the other" You know the words.

PRISONER: (Starting up the aisle.) "-then sighing, said the other, 'have thy will, I am the love that dare not speak its name."

(The PRISONER has gone back to the summer house.)

SALOME: My hand, sir, take it. Look into my eyes. There is a planetarium in my eyes. I've most of the big dipper in my left eye; in my right eye, you have a good go at the morning star. Keep out of that summer house! You locked the door, didn't you? I heard the click. Do you want me to come back there and break that door down? You like that, don't you—breaking down doors. Come out. Come out come out come out. We'll have a party to welcome you. Waltzing does a lot for the soul. One, two, three; come, two, three; out, two, three. La...sir...La, if you think you have the right to refuse propriety. I dish out the rights around here. I shan't be the poor loser in a contest won by a summer house. Not I, sir. (To LANE .) Lane, tell an amusing story.

LANE: (BILL still cradled in his arms.) Once upon a time, there was a young footman-

SALOME: Never mind, Lane, things are quite funny enough. (To the summer house.) Do you hear that in there? I think your hilarious attitude is in bad taste. You tire me. I am finished with you. (Calling off-stage.) Herod?! Mamma?! Everybody on stage.

(HEROD and LADY H enter USC through the French doors.)

HEROD: It's about time!

LADY H: No footman to announce us?!

HEROD: Only two chairs, where will-

LADY H: (Coming upon BILL's body.) Rise, sir, from that completely recumbent position.

SALOME: He can't, mamma, he butter-knifed himself to death.

HEROD: Who's responsible for this carnage?

SALOME: The butler did it.

LADY H: Not another one.

HEROD: (To LANE.) Remove it.

LANE: (With a dark look toward the summerhouse.) If Miss Salome is finished with it.

SALOME: Quite finished, thank you, Lane-

(GLADYS and LANE pull BILL's body to the side. LANE covers it with the cope of Moloch.
LANE and GLADYS exit SR, unobtrusively)

SALOME: (To HEROD and LADY H.) Have you any idea how long you've kept me waiting out here?

HEROD: My dear child-

LADY H: You sent us back in.

SALOME: (To HEROD.) You and mamma have talked it over, yes?

LADY H: Herod and I-

SALOME: Yes or no?

HEROD: We did happen to discuss-

SALOME: To what conclusion?

LADY H: The conclusion is up to you.

SALOME: In other words, I'm to be it.

HEROD: I wouldn't put it-

SALOME: I am up to here with answers! Before I enter into any relationship with a male-

LADY H: (Fanning herself.) Salome, please, the "opposite sex!"

SALOME: (To HEROD.) Before I contract with you, corporate or carnal-

HEROD: The necessary papers have been-

LADY H: We're rich!

HEROD: Your mother, acting as your agent-

SALOME: I'm adding a rider to the contract.

LADY H: He hasn't anything left.

SALOME: (With a look toward the summer house.) Oh, yes, he has.

HEROD: What do you want?

SALOME: (To HEROD.) You desire me?

HEROD: (Looking for LANE.) Where's the Ravel?

LADY H: (Helping herself to champagne.) We can dispense with the music.

SALOME: (To HEROD.) You crave and covet me?

HEROD: I'm very fond of you...where is Lane?

SALOME: And you will give me anything I ask?

HEROD: (Falling to his knees.) Miss Salome, deep in my heart-

SALOME: Get up.

HEROD: (Rising.) You're taking the romance out of it.

SALOME: Answer my question.

HEROD: What is it that you want?

SALOME: Just give it to me.

HEROD: Aren't you expected to dance?

SALOME: Later maybe. There's a little waltz step I'm warming up right now.

LADY H: Then it's settled! Quelle surprise. What an alliance. (Lifting a glass to SALOME and HEROD.) To the both of you.

SALOME: No, mamma, it is not settled.

HEROD: But-

SALOME: As soon as I've been given what I want.

HEROD: Then tell me what it is.

SALOME: (To the summer house.) Him.

LADY H: Who?

SALOME: I want him. In there. He who rejected me.

HEROD: He isn't mine to give.

LADY H: He belongs to justice.

HEROD: To this summer house and those to follow.

LADY H: And you don't want him—who knows where he's been.

SALOME: Fair enough. I consent to settle for his head.

HEROD: Do you know what you're asking for?

SALOME: From here up!

LADY H: My dear child-

SALOME: When little girls start asking for heads, they're no longer addressed as child.

HEROD: Anything else...the sun...the stars...the-

SALOME: No moon!

HEROD: (Opening his jacket, displaying a cache of jewels.) Could I interest you in a few precious gems—the black pearl of Poseidon...the Queen of Sheba's sapphire...the diamond diadem of Dido...Rasputin's ruby...the emerald of Montezuma...Donald Trump's digital watch?

SALOME: I lust for a head; give it to me, Herod!

LADY H: I swoon!

SALOME: Whatever you think best, mamma.

HEROD: He hasn't had his trial yet.

SALOME: Try him here, now, guilty.

HEROD: We'd need a jury.

SALOME: I am your jury.

LADY H: Not in the face of history.

SALOME: Bother history.

HEROD: I'll not have history slandered, not in my garden.

SALOME: Stop procrastinating, Herod, throw the lions to the Christians.

LADY H: Dear, you've got that back to front.

SALOME: No, mamma, I haven't.

HEROD: Court will come to order.

SALOME: Are we ever out of order?

HEROD: The accused?

SALOME: Your guess is as good as mine.

LADY H: You want his head and you don't even know his name?

SALOME: He has hundreds of names. Hundreds of thousands-

HEROD: His crime?

SALOME: You must know, you locked him up.

HEROD: After careful deliberation, we find the defendant-

LADY H: Guilty!

SALOME: Then give me his head.

HEROD: It's yours.

SALOME: How do I get it off?

HEROD: Not my jurisdiction.

SALOME: (Demurely.) Antipas, my sweet-

HEROD: Not on your tintype.

SALOME: Twiddle, I should have saved Bill. (Looking toward LADY H.) Mamma-

LADY H: Surely you jest.

SALOME: Where is Lane?

(GLADYS enters USL. She has changed, is dressed as she was at the start of the play. She is jumping; ship.)

SALOME: Gladys, bring me his head.

GLADYS: Are you for real?

SALOME: Sir Herod gave it to me.

GLADYS: (with chilly courtesy.) Nice of you to try to include me in the action..(To the audience as she exits DSR.)..hell, I seldom last beyond the first ten minutes of the play. Let's face it, there aren't that many plays left with maids in them.

SALOME: If somebody doesn't do as I ask, I shall hold my breath until I-

(LANE enters down the aisle with the tray from Act One. On it is the PRISONER's head, covered with a colorful tea cozy.)

LANE: I found the tray thrown away in the shrubbery.

SALOME: (in awe.) Is this?

LANE: (Climbing onto the stage, giving the head to SALOME.) I put a tea cozy on it to keep it warm. (BILL has been revenged.)

SALOME: A wonderful head!

(The fake phono sputters to life with the "severed head" motif from the opera *Salome* by Richard Strauss)

SALOME: (To the head.) You did come to me, sir. I have in my hands, on a precious middle period Mesopotamian tray, under the cozy auntie deFarge crocheted for me, a head. Bad country, miserable year, but a good head. An anonymous head. (Tweaking it under the chin.) Aren't you sorry you never told me your real name? Now you'll never get proper credit. We must celebrate. We must sing and laugh and dance...dance! Yes! We must dance! (A sleazy bump and grind rendition of Maurice Ravel's *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* is heard) Herod, we're going to a ball.

LADY H: (Producing a hat fit for Ascot from out of nowhere.) Not without a hat.

SALOME: (Handing head to Sir HEROD.) Careful, don't drop it.

LADY H: (Giving the hat to SALOME.) Then you are happy?

SALOME: (Putting on the hat.) Delirious. We're going all the way to France, mamma. I'll tell Louis and Marie you send your love.

LADY H: Do that, dear. And should you chance to drop in on Caesar after the ball, give him one for me.

SALOME: (Retrieving the head from Sir HEROD.) A young lady may well do without the benefit of naked trumpeters, if first, she takes special care to master the intricacies of the waltz. (She begins a slow waltz with the head.)

HEROD: Now she dances!

LANE: But with her hat on-

LADY H: -like the proper girl I raised her to be.

SALOME: Take solace from that as I exit waltzing.

(Ravel's *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* mutates into an insane and energetic distortion of a Waltz, the music swells as the lights BLACKOUT.)