Yet another entry, four days later, elaborates on her feelings should she be summoned to return to San Francisco: "Somehow I feel so anxious about Theo. I am so afraid I will have to go home, but then I must not lose my courage. We will get a new trial and all will turn out to our satisfaction. I would be such a disappointment to them all were I to go home now."

This was followed, the next day, by a sudden meditation, unique to the diary. Totally ignoring the preceding entries, it opened with a rhetorical question:

What is music study? Real hard work? In America we have an altogether different picture in our minds of study in Europe. We think "Oh for a chance to study abroad," and yet when we are here we seem to lose the picture from out of our sight and work along in a semi-earnest fashion and then when everything goes slowly and we make little progress, we blame it on lack of talent etc. Much talent is thrown away just so – through wanting to do with little work.

On Christmas Eve, Ernst, the eldest of the Ilgenstein children, returned from Hamburg, where he had been a student. He at once became spellbound with his mother’s new boarder. "We made time spin this evening," runs Maud’s diary for December 26, "in fact all day. We had Living Pictures. Ernst and I presented 'Lebensmüde' ['Tired of Life'] and was good, so the others say. Everyone joined in, even [twelve-year-old] Heinz. Ernst has taken upon himself to be my champion, and now the first to say anything that don’t suit him (about me) he is up in arms."

In choosing "Lebensmüde" as the theme of their living picture presentation, Maud and Ernst no doubt intended to personify the spirit of deep-seated ennui, so popular a pose with their generation. However, Maud’s participation in this living picture is of particular interest for two reasons. The first relates to her later success as the Salome Dancer.

For Richard Wagner and Charles Baudelaire, two of the progenitors of the Decadent movement, an ennui so deep-rooted as to be more a disgust than a tiredness with life led
them beyond the conventions of social behaviour and creative expression. The affinity of Maud’s art with the Decadent movement, which flourished throughout the last third of the nineteenth century, is very clear. Much of her sensational success lay in her daring projection of such feelings, from her unique portrayal of Salome (already a cult figure for the Decadents) to her intensely personal version of Salome’s story. It may be argued that, although the Decadent movement culminated sociologically in Oscar Wilde’s downfall, its last aesthetic expression was Maud’s forgotten *Vision of Salome*. The “Lebensmüde” tableau, therefore, was a primitive, unconscious foreshadowing of the daring originality of *The Vision of Salome*.

The second element of interest has to do with psychological insight, a faculty the skilfully manipulative Maud possessed far more with regard to others than to herself. As she appraised the year 1896, her strength of character reinforced by the haunting dread of failing her mother’s expectations no doubt prevented any persistent feeling that she was “tired of life,” even though she had many reasons to be so. Instead of enjoying the Christmas holidays in Berlin with her darling mother and beloved brother, she was passing it as the impoverished boarder in a modest Berlin pension. Instead of completing his medical studies in Berlin, Theo was a condemned murderer in San Francisco, the outcome of his appeal for a new trial increasingly uncertain. Instead of advancing in her piano studies, Maud had been warned that her state of mind threatened to impede her progress. Instead of feeling at ease with the American colony in Berlin, she shunned all but a certain Mrs. Rice, terrified lest she be asked about Theo. Finally, instead of being begged to return home in this time of crisis, she had been ordered by her brother to remain in Berlin.

Little wonder, therefore, that the Ilgenstein family and Maud’s fellow boarders were impressed by the “Lebensmüde” presentation: by putting her heart and soul into the presentation she had, unknown to her audience and very probably to herself, given vent to her innermost feelings. In