

MAY NOT BE BORROWED

60/5760

"HIS GENTLE ART  
OF MAKING ENEMIES"

A Comedy in Three Acts

by

Musette Morell.

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PERSONS OF THE PLAY (in order of appearance)

Lady Meed.  
Felicity Ecks, her niece.  
Dibbs, Whistler's man.  
Oscar Wilde.  
Thomas Woodbee.  
Edward Coppie ) pupils of Whistler  
Frederick Coppie )  
James Abbot McNeill Whistler.  
George Du Maurier.  
Count Rudello.  
A Precious Young Man.  
Beatrice Godwin.  
Barthe, an art dealer.  
Sir John Holker, Attorney General.  
  
2 Bailiffs; an auctioneer and Buyers.

ACT I.

"Sunday Morning Breakfast with Whistler"  
ROOM in Whistler's house, Lindsay Road. Sept. 1878.

ACT II.

"The Trial".  
An ante-room of the Exchequer Division, Westminster.  
November 26th. 1878.

SCENE 2:-  
Same as Act I. That night.

ACT III.

Same as Act I. An afternoon in May 1879. Six months later.

SYNOPSIS.

"HIS GENTLE ART (of making enemies)" is a play on the life and times of Whistler and his coterie.

ACT I. is set in Whistler's house, London; and introduces us to one of his famous Sunday morning breakfasts. The gay and distinguished company discuss the host, who is late — as usual. When he appears his wit and charm captivate, among the rest, Felicity, who meets him for the first time. Whistler is smitten by her beauty. The conversation veers to the forthcoming case of Whistler v Ruskin and much excitement is the upshot. Felicity's aunt, Lady Hood, leaves in great dudgeon, with Felicity in tow. Whistler is almost persuaded to drop the case when a message arrives from Ruskin's solicitors, and Whistler is now in, neck and crop.

ACT II. Scene 1. An ante-room at the court, where the celebrated trial is proceeding. The extravagant bohemian wins the case; and, though he has to find his own costs, is grimly elated. At the close he is approached by a delightful woman, Beatrice Godwin, who sympathises with him eagerly and intelligently.

ACT II. Scene 2. The Banquet, in Whistler's house, that night, to celebrate his "victory". The bailiffs are there, but Whistler has disguised them as waiters. Now Felicity, as well as fortune, fails him. As the furniture is being removed, a table falls apart — he seizes a piece of it. They have left him, at least, a leg to stand on!

ACT III. Six months later. Again Whistler's house, but stripped bare. Du Maurier and Beatrice sit over a picnic lunch, at a box. The hammer of the auctioneer, selling up Whistler's effects, can be heard off stage. Whistler is so whit dispirited — and there are comic scenes between him and the buyers; a serious confab between him and Du Maurier and, later, a romantic one with Beatrice. They survey the empty room — to be sure they have a clean start, and gaily end the play.

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ACT ONE

SCENE:- A luxurious room in the house of James Abbot McNeill Whistler, Lindsay Road, London, in the year 1878. The furnishings are original without being bizarre. There are pictures on the walls and some exquisite bits of blue and white about.

A large settee is parallel to foots down L; and a round table set for eight persons, up stage near wall R. There are three doors. The one down R. leads to Whistler's bedroom and bathroom. The one up L. leads to stairs, etc., and the double glass doors at back open on to a small balcony beyond which can be seen the Thames through a veil of fog.

There are three people in the room:

LADY MEED (large worn out woman, daily renovated at the Beauty Parlors, fashionably dressed, replete with lorgnette) and

FELICITY ECKS, a very beautiful girl, are seated in attitudes of impatient boredom. The third person,

DIBBS, a man-servant, is standing behind a small table down R. He is intent on sealing six bottles of wine; each with a different coloured sealing wax, which he lights at a taper on the table.

- FELICITY Mr. Whistler takes a long time to dress.
- LADY M. What time is it now, Felicity?
- FELICITY (looking at watch) Twenty minutes to one, Aunt.
- LADY M. Is that the correct time, my man?
- DIBBS No; your ladyship, it is slow.
- LADY M. What time is it by that clock, Felicity?
- FELICITY Twenty minutes past one, Aunt.
- LADY M. Is that clock correct, my man?
- DIBBS No; your ladyship, it is fast..... The faster the clock the slower Mr. Whistler is. The more time he has, the less he leaves himself to spare. But Mr. Whistler always takes a long time to dress.
- LADY M. Extraordinary man! ..... He's an American.
- FELICITY Oh, is that what it is! His manner of welcoming his guests is certainly unEnglish.
- LADY M. S-s-s-sh dear! His servant will hear you. (Dibbs goes out L., taking the bottles already sealed) That's the worst of servants to-day. In my time servants were deaf and dumb. But in this dreadfully democratic age they not only have ears and eyes but rights as well. I really don't know what the working classes are coming to. If they keep on like this they will soon be as bad as Society. (Dibbs returns with more wax and sets to work on remaining bottles) What are you doing with those bottles of wine, my man, sealing them with different coloured wax?
- DIBBS It is Mr. Whistler's orders, your ladyship.
- LADY M. You are quite sure Mr. Whistler expected me for breakfast?
- DIBBS Quite sure, your ladyship.
- LADY M. Who else has been invited?
- DIBBS There is a Mr. Du Maurier ---

- FELICITY The brilliant man on "Punch"?
- DIBBS He does draw for "Punch", Miss. Then there are the brothers Coppie, and Mr. Thomas Woodbee --
- FELICITY (to Lady Meed) Thomas! I didn't know he was to be here.
- DIBBS Mr. Wilde --
- FELICITY The winner of the Newdigate prize! I should like to meet him.
- LADY M. I told you, you would enjoy your visit.
- DIBBS (patiently) And Count Rudello. (Doorbell rings. Dibbs goes out L.)
- LADY M. Why I'd forgotten about the Count. I wonder why he isn't here. I told him breakfast was at noon.
- FELICITY I wonder why they aren't all here!
- LADY M. Someone is coming now! (Dibbs ushers in Oscar Wilde. A large elaborate young man, pudgy and pasty faced. His dress is eccentric)
- LADY M. Ah, ah, Mr. Wilde!
- WILDE (kissing her hand) My dear Lady Meed -- Spring may fly from the gardens but we may always be sure of recapturing her, where you are.
- LADY M. (behind her fan) O-oh Mr. Wilde -- as wild as ever! Meet my niece, Felicity Ecks.
- WILDE (kissing her hand) I am ravished! (Dibbs takes the bottle out L.)
- LADY M. We are so relieved to see you. I can't imagine what can be detaining Mr. Whistler. I was invited for breakfast at noon and we've been here for, literally, hundreds of years. We are told by his man that he is dressing looking round to see that Dibbs is not listening) He must be putting on an awful lot of clothes. And, aren't you very late?
- WILDE I am not late. It is you who are early. When Jimmie invites one to breakfast at noon and one arrives at half past one, then one is just one half hour early.
- FELICITY Is Mr. Whistler never punctual ... by accident?
- WILDE Never. Jimmie is always late -- he has nothing else to do. (bell rings off, downstairs L.)
- FELICITY (to Lady Meed) As I said, unEnglish! (to Wilde) What is this Jimmie like?
- WILDE He is a genius in the daytime and a butterfly at night. (Dibbs ushers in Thomas Woodbee -- a stiff, formal gentleman of an academic cast of mind)
- WOODBEE Are you talking of me? (sees Felicity and at once makes towards the settee)
- WILDE Not this once. We were discussing the genius of our host. Of course you know Lady Meed and --
- WOODBEE (Kissing her hand) Lady Meed, this is a pleasure! (over his shoulder to Wilde) Talking of Jimmie? Who gives a fig for his genius? He is a good cook and knows how to dress -- that's all the world cares. If it weren't for that he could starve. (bends to speak to Felicity)

- LADY M. If he can cook, he need never starve.
- WOODBEE (to Felicity, kissing her hand) But had I known you were to be here, I should have arrived with the sunrise.
- LADY M. (tartly) Then you wouldn't be here yet Thomas, for the sun is still wrapped in a blanket of fog.
- WILDE But he may rise at any moment. That is the charm of this temperamental London weather, it wears at least six moods within twenty four hours. To keep pace with it, I always carry half a dozen buttonholes with me — then I am prepared for anything. Six buttonholes a day, keeps mal apropos at bay!
- woodbee Oh, didn't I read that somewhere?
- WILDE Doubtless you did — it's good, isn't it? I intend including it in my next three plays.
- WOODBEE With acknowledgements to the author?
- WILDE Certainly not. I rescued it from obscurity. By including it in my plays I give it to (blowing a kiss) Immortality!
- LADY M. How generous these young authors are to Immortality! Far more generous than Immortality is to them it seems.
- FELICITY I have been wanting to ask you, Mr. Wilde, which two books, in your opinion are the greatest in the world?
- WILDE There are not two great books — Miss Ecks, I have as yet written only one.
- LADY M. My dear, I never can make out why you go in for reading — exactly as though you belonged to that vulgar class which tries to improve itself.
- FELICITY Modesty whispers, improvement may be possible — even with me.
- WILDE You are by far too beautiful to resort to modesty, Miss Ecks. Plain girls are driven by their aesthetic sense, to shelter behind the figleaf modesty — for which we may be truly grateful. But it is the tragedy of life that beautiful girls should ever be modest.
- LADY M. But we are speaking of knowledge, Mr. Wilde, not dress; and I see no reason why my niece should endeavour to cultivate a brain — belonging to the sphere she does!
- FELICITY But —
- LADY M. Nonsense, child! You belong to society —
- WILDE Where 'tis folly to be wise.
- WOODBEE And fashionable to be foolish.
- WILDE In fact, frailty is expected of us. After all, it's our sins that make our reputation. To understand mankind one should make a life-long study of vice — his virtues can be learnt in half a day. (crosses to balcony doors and gazes out) Weather foggy; color scheme maroon! (fingers buttonhole) Ah, my wallflower (tiger-lily) is still a la mode.
- LADY M. (crossing to him) No, I declare the fog is lifting. (with enthusiasm) What a splendid summer we are having! (they stroll out on balcony)
- FELICITY Mr. Wilde is very witty.
- WOODBEE (taking Lady Mead's place on settee) But not original. I

doubt if he would ever have anything to say, if Jimmie did not speak first.

FELICITY And what is this Jimmie like?

WOODBEE Why should we be interested in him?

FELICITY But I wish to know.

WOODBEE (reluctant) He is like the little girl in the nursery rhyme — he has one curl that hangs right down his forehead. Only his curl is white.

FELICITY Oh, I've heard about that. Who hasn't? (their voices dim)  
(Lady M. and Wilde come in from balcony)

LADY M. (tapping Wilde with her fan and laughing) You naughty man! When will you grow serious?

WILDE When you learn not to be.

LADY M. Henceforth I shall not mean a thing I say.

WILDE Then I shall adore you.

LADY M. (archly) You told me you did.

WILDE That was before I grew serious.

LADY M. And now, — you do?

WILDE Providing you are frivolous, as promised, and do not love me. (they come down R. and sit)

LADY M. Good gracious. Is that a necessary stipulation?

WILDE Most certainly; the only woman fit for one to love is the incurably frivolous woman who does not love one. She is so technical; so artistic. The practical woman who doesn't love one is too rampantly stolid for flirtation, whilst the woman who sincerely loves one is the most superlatively boring out of Paradise. (door bell rings off)

FELICITY (laughing) And what is Paradise?

WILDE The place where we feel nothing and effect everything. (Dibbs ushers in the Brothers Coppie, Edward and Frederick. They are very young editions of Woodbee, but given to enthusiasms; and whereas Woodbee worships the old, the Coppies worship the new. At present their worship is given to their painting master and so, whenever Whistler smokes the Coppies require their cigarette at the same instant: when Whistler adjusts his eyeglass, the Coppies affix glass in their own eyes that gaze humbly in the same direction as the master's even though they may be blind to what is seen by him.)

ED. All hail, Thomas! Oscar, you are looking remarkably fit.

FRED Extraordinarily.

WILDE Yes, all my friends tell me I look weeks younger. It is this new style of buttonhole. (to Lady Meed) Allow me to present the brothers Coppie, pupils of our host. Ed. and Fred, — Lady Meed — the most beautiful woman in London. (hand-kissing. Lady M. sips) and Miss Ecks, the most beautiful young woman in London! (more hand-kissing; — Lady M. glares)

ED. This is charming!

FRED I see everyone has arrived except our host, which is the

- rule, and so quite in order.
- FELICITY Disorder would seem to be the rule of our host then.
- WILDE Oh, no one minds Jimmie. To endeavour to control him would be like attempting to regulate nature herself.
- FELICITY It would appear to me that he would do well to possess a little of Nature's care for others.
- ED. But there was never a more generous man than master.
- FRED. Never!
- WILDE (to Woodbee) Which means Jimmie has paid their debts for them again.
- FELICITY (to the Coppies) Indeed. What is this paragon like?
- ED. Like anybody but himself.
- FRED But witty — fascinating!
- ED. Fascinating — witty!
- FELICITY What I wish to know is, is he tall or short, fat or lean?
- WOODBEE Rather under middle height.
- WILDE Ah, but brevity is the statue of wit!
- ED. (aside to Fred) Master said that first.
- FRED (ditto) But it's never too late for Oscar.
- FELICITY What I mean is, is he attractive?
- ED. Look at his pictures — he always says that he is there for those who can find him. (Felicity rises to look at pictures)
- WILDE He is delightful to those who can find him. Startling, alarming to those who can not. Besides being the discoverer of blue and white, he has converted the British home from a museum to a thing of beauty. When I came up from Oxford I found him the most caricatured man of all London. He deserves to be for he is unique — he is the one man I have discovered who manages to love life without hating his fellow men.
- LADY M. Listen! (they do) What is that peculiar sound like running water?
- FRED Ha, it is master taking the plug out of his bath.
- ED. It's all right, it's all right, he won't be long now!
- LADY M. Bath! What a man — why can't he keep such habits to himself, instead of advertising his eccentricities.
- WOODBEE But just consider our good Queen Victoria — she takes her tub every Saturday night.
- LADY M. I know, I know. It's a court scandal. (Felicity and the Coppies move round room, looking at pictures) Woodbee's eyes follow her)
- WILDE Our Queen was always unconventional. Didn't she introduce the use of chloroform to England.
- WOODBEE I believe it was almost the cause of divorcing the Church from the State. (Felicity and the Coppies wander out on to the balcony. Woodbee crosses to balcony door and looks



- out at her)
- LADY M. But I thought the Church always believed in chloroform.
- WILDE Only for the faithful, Lady Neeed.... Sin is the career of the Church. Being naturally ambitious she is always looking for new sins; and so when chloroform came along it was pounced upon and pronounced upon as an invention of Satan, a horrible device for making woman drunk and a contradiction of the divine command that in pain shall she bring forth children.
- LADY M. What have children to do with chloroform?
- WILDE The Queen indulged in chloroform for her seventh confinement.
- LADY M. H'm -- that accounts for it -- I always knew there was something strange about the duke -- he is still chloroformed. (enter R. James Abbot McNeill Whistler faultlessly dressed. Rather foreign in appearance with one white lock, like a plume, in the centre of his dark curly hair. Though small, his is the commanding presence and when he speaks others listen, for he uses words, as well as the brush, like an artist. He is a glamorous, sensitive creature of fiery spirit and a strange personal charm)
- WILDE Ah, here comes the butterfly! Jimmie, we are discussing our perennial Victoria -- Lady of many virtues.
- WHISTLER (laughing) Virtues too humorous to mention! (greeting) Ah, Oscar! Ah, Lady Neeed you have come at last (before she can reply) But where is Count Rudello?
- LADY M. He said he would come on later -- I didn't know by that, that he meant he would come late.
- WILDE If he's merely two hours late then he will be in nice time for breakfast. We are all as peckish as critics.
- WHISTLER What a good sign. (rings gong)
- LADY M. (to Whistler) Mr. Whistler, have I told you about my niece, Felicity Ecks? She is quite beautiful.
- WHISTLER (gaily) Then I don't wish to meet her. For if she is conventionally beautiful, her mind will be as tidy and as formal as her features. Beauty in woman should be like genius in man -- extraordinary! And if she is extraordinarily beautiful your people would never allow that she is beautiful at all. (enter Dibbs. Whistler nods and he exits L. again for dishes as doorbell rings off)
- LADY M. You infer then that our people do not love beauty?
- WHISTLER Love it? Ha, ha! they despise it. They love prize fighters. They consider art is effeminate and imagine the artist to be a man who paints lovely women merely because he is too weak to be a prize athlete and win them.
- LADY M. Oh, you Americans are like all young things -- so superior.
- WHISTLER Young? Well, the artist is ever the latest thing on the planet. Young! Younger! Youngest! -- So much for degrees. (Dibbs ushers in Du Maurier) Here's one of the superior young creatures now. (Throws his arms wide in a joyous gesture which loosens the buttons on his waistcoat.) Come in, come right in! Lady Neeed, allow me to present -- George Du Maurier!
- LADY M. How do you do.
- DU MAURIER How do you do. (Bows, then turns to Whistler) Jimmie, Jimmie,

- what have you been doing?
- WHISTLER I? Oh, making a directory of new creditors.
- DU MAURIER No, no, I mean what have you been doing to Mr. Ruskin?
- WHISTLER Oh, don't let's talk of the dead. Come and meet —
- DU MAURIER (interrupting) When can I see you to talk. To-night?
- WHISTLER Sorry — I —
- DU MAURIER Then tomorrow night, for certain?
- WHISTLER For certain? Certainly (hails Wilde over) Oscar, meet George Du Maurier. George, this is my new friend, Oscar Wilde, the apostle of Beauty!
- DU MAURIER (smiling) I am honoured to meet the disciple. I hear you have Jimmie's wit, Mr. Wilde.
- WHISTLER (laughing) Oh, yes, he even has my witticisms. He trundles in the suburbs what I say in the studios, don't you Oscar?
- WILDE (recklessly) Then which of us two invented the other?
- WHISTLER Well, I was born first.
- WILDE Then you are out of date.
- WHISTLER No; merely beyond my time. I am a prophet who delights to play the part of Pierrot, while you Oscar, are the Pierrot who tries to play the prophet. (clapping his hands) To chairs, ladies and gentlemen, to chairs! We cannot wait for Count Rudello a minute longer.
- WILDE AT last!
- WHISTLER (to Dibbs in passing) Did you see to the labels on the wine?
- DIBBS All is as you ordered, sir. Oh, there is a letter for you, sir — it came last night after you had gone to bed.
- WHISTLER Not now — later.
- DIBBS Yes, sir. (They begin to take their seats at table. At sound of Whistler's clapping, Felicity, Woodbee and the Connies have come in from the balcony)
- FRED Felicitations, Master.
- ED. I salute you, Master. Ah, your waistcoat! (Noticing Whistler's waistcoat is undone, they both hurriedly and secretly undo their own, meanwhile Whistler has turned and seen Felicity. He is spellbound)
- BADY M. Felicity, dear, this is our host.
- FELICITY (coming forward) Your guests have been impatient to welcome you, Sir Host.
- WHISTLER (slowly) For such a welcome, who would not be late... You know I used to say that nature was invariably wrong — but now that I see you (sincerely) she is a great artist.
- WOODBEE (after a pause) Come, come, Jimmie, are you spellbound? (Bell rings off. Whistler starts as if from a dream)
- WHISTLER (still holding Felicity's hand) Will you sit here beside me? (to others) Perhaps that ring is Count Rudello now.
- DU MAURIER Count?

- WHISTLER     Ed. A likely purchaser. All money and no taste -- hard to please. (the Coppies nod)
- DU MAURIER     Count?
- WHISTLER     Yes. He's an Italian! All Italians are Counts, the distinction is issued with their passports. (the Coppies shake their heads. Dibbs shows in Count Rudello, a fat prosperous merchant) Ah, my dear Count Rudello, come in, come in, we have been counting the seconds till your arrival.
- COUNT R.     Mr. Whistelaire?
- WHISTLER     The very same.
- COUNT R.     (grabbing his hand) How you do do, Senor Whistelaire?
- WHISTLER     You must meet our company. You know Lady Meed of course. Count Rudello -- Miss Ecks; George Du Maurier, the idol of "Punch" and of George Du Maurier; Thomas Woodbee, who never will be; Edward and Frederick Coppie, the perfect apes; and Oscar Wilde, who promises to be our most promising young poet for generations to come! (all laugh, except at the description of themselves)
- COUNT R.     I am delighted to miss you all. How you do, do! I regret to be late but I first stop a leetle with a friend who is (sadly) very seeck, and (smiling) very pretty.
- WHISTLER     Condolences and congratulations, Count. Dibbs, go down into the cellar and bring up a bottle of wine - eh, one with the red seal. (Dibbs has quietly laid an extra place at table and the Count is by now seated in it. Whistler sits and talks to Felicity)
- ED.     Oscar, you are out of season. (pointing to his open waistcoat) Behold the latest!
- FRED.     But you aren't eating. Don't allow bad style to keep you from good food.
- WILDE     No food, thank you. Just a little color.
- WHISTLER     Ah, pass the greens to Oscar.
- WILDE     No, no, merci beaucoup. (Rises and crosses to small table behind settee, carefully selects two or three violets from a bowl on the table and eats them languidly) All save Whistler and Felicity, look on! See, these three violets - may I? ... Ah! (Wiping his mouth with a gorgeous handkerchief) Now I have had my salad! (Dibbs returns with wine)
- WHISTLER     Try some of this wine, Count.
- COUNT R.     You are an American, Senor Whistelaire, and yet you speak English -- eet is veery strange. My leetle friend, so seeck, so preety, ees a countr' man of yours and ahi she would give half of me, could she make de Engleesh.
- WILDE     Quite hopeless. Accents are born, not made.
- COUNT R.     (mournfully) Then she is hopeless? Ahi ..... She comes from Cheecago.
- WHISTLER     (rising and going the rounds with the bottle in it a cradle) Ah, Chicago! Dear me, a wonderful place, I really must pay it a call some day, for, you know, my grandfather founded the city, and my uncle was the last commander of Fort Dearborn.
- DU MAURIER     And Paris? Jimmie, when are we going to revisit Paris?
- WHISTLER     (Kissing his fingertips) Will you ever forget our student

- days in Paris?
- DU M'IER Joe -- Remember your picture of the little grisette, Joe?
- WHISTLER Ha, Ha! I painted her dress open at the neck, didn't I? And you chappiez were afraid that that might prevent the picture being hung in the Salon.
- DU M'IER And you said, that if it was rejected you would open her bodice more and more each year until the time when you were elected, and then you would hang it yourself. (laughter) And what they said about it at the Church Conference! Ho! Remember?
- WHISTLER I can't forget. It seems that ugly thing, excessive virtue, always springs from the virtuous one's own secret ugliness.
- LADY M. Really, Mr. Whistler, do you mean to infer by that that virtuous people are hideous?
- WHISTLER Only on the inside. Though of course real virtue is always beautiful. Eh, try some raw tomatoes, Lady Meed.
- LADY M. Raw tomatoes, good gracious!
- WHISTLER Yes; raw! Rude and crude! (laughter)
- FELICITY They look very pretty.
- WHISTLER And taste it, too!
- WOODBEE (dour) At least the Church Conference was only honestly saying what it thought. But that is the trouble, we English are too honest; we always have been stupidly honest.
- WHISTLER True, Thomas. You see, Count, it is now historically acknowledged that whenever there has been honesty in this country, there has been stupidity.
- WOODBEE (turning angrily away) Quite impossible!
- WHISTLER (innocently) In a sane world - quite!! But I assure you it is true. Dibbs, go down into the cellar and bring up two bottles of wine. Eh, one with the green seal and one with the white seal, Dibbs.
- COUNT R. Aha! I see you are a connoisseur?
- WHISTLER (smiling at her as he fills Felicity's glass) Of beauty!
- ED. When are we to see your new picture, master?
- FRED Yes, your picture, master?
- COUNT R. (delighted) Aha! You paint, too?
- WHISTLER (laughing) Now and then! But have some more wine Count, I see you understand it. (Dibbs returns with wines) Oh, here you are, Dibbs. Would you please go back to the cellar and bring up another bottle -- one with the yellow seal. Count Rudello understands my -- wines! (laughter) (Dibbs Withdraws)
- COUNT R. (chuckling) Aha, yes! (pointing to his mouth) I have all my understanding here! (laughter) But, now I do theenk of eet, Lady Meed did told me you do paint... great people.. Disraeli.
- WHISTLER I am to paint Disraeli -- God help him!
- COUNT R. And 'Enery Hirveeng?

- WHISTLER (nodding) Henry Irving (brandishing bottle) the last of the barnstormers! God help us!
- COUNT R. And your other old chap -- eh, Thomas Carlyle?
- WHISTLER (nodding) Thomas Carlyle -- God help his wife! (laughter) (Dibbs returns with the wine)
- DU M'IER How did you get on with Carlyle?
- WHISTLER (pouring wine for Ed.) I get on very well with True Thomas, chiefly by never interrupting except when he grew exhausted.
- WOODBEE I knew his late wife, Jane. A remarkably intelligent woman.
- WHISTLER Wife? Well, of course, True Thomas was married to Jane but I wouldn't call her his "Wife".
- WILDE Leave that to the psychologists.
- LADY M. (lorgnette raised) Where are the psychologists? Pass them to me. With all these new fangled foods one never knows when one dines out, whether one is being poisoned or merely given indigestion.
- WHISTLER (to Count R.) Some more wine, Count? Try some of this yellow seal.
- COUNT R. Thank you, thank you; if I have any more I well have to swim home. (Holds out his glass which Whistler fills)
- WHISTLER (glass aloft) To your swim!
- WOODBEE (stiffly) When ~~are~~ are we to see the new picture?
- WHISTLER WE are all impatient for the revelation. (Whistler relinquishes the bottle to the Count and crosses to the easel behind the settee. He uncovers a large picture on the easel. The other rise and exclaim.)
- ED. O-o-o-o-h!!!!
- FRED. A masterpiece!
- WILDE Another one!
- LADY M. (with lorgnette raised) But why do you call it a nocturne?
- ED. (forefinger raised) S-s-s-h! You do not understand.
- FRED. (forefinger ditto) Art is mysterious.
- LADY M. But surely the artist should understand it.
- ED. S-s-s-h! dear Lady Meed, you are disturbing the atmosphere.
- LADY M. Really, young man, you are most offensive. The idea of comparing me to an aroma.
- WILDE Forgive him, sweet Lady. Ed, you should remember comparisons are odorous.
- FRED (rapturously) Ah, master, if only I could paint like that!
- WHISTLER Never mind if you can't -- take heart! you will be hung in the Academy.
- FRED. But when one does not know how to draw what should one do?
- WOODBEE Attend an Art School.

- WHISTLER Wrong! One should found an Art School. (laughter. Wilde takes a note of it. The Coppies nod as though they had known it all along.)
- COUNT R. (to Wilde) Est is nice?
- WILDE It is nicer. If it said any more it would mean less.
- COUNT R. (to Felicity) And what does the Signorina theenk of eet?
- FELICITY (softly) It is beautiful.
- WHISTLER Thank you! (in high spirits) You like it, George?  
(Du Maurier nods)
- WOODBEE It is imaginative to the point of being invisible.
- COUNT R. Est is certainly preety, eff one could see it.. I think my leetle seeck friend she say it was like Chicago.
- WHISTLER She sounds like a critic. (laughter)
- WOODBEE (superciliously) H'm.. ah..Yes! Eh, the light is a little too bright, perhaps, and the shadows a little too dark. H'm... ah... yes! But of course it's a matter of taste.
- WHISTLER (stung) No, remember, Thomas, so that you may not make the mistake again, that it is not a matter of taste at all -- but of comprehension.
- WOODBEE Well, then, it isn't good.
- WHISTLER (with the indulgent air of a patient schoolmaster) You shouldn't say it isn't good; you should say you don't like it; and then you will not be criticising me, only yourself. After all, you yourself paint, don't you? So, as an heir-presumptive to the Throne of Fame, it is easier for you to please yourself than for me to please you!
- WILDE (making a note of it) Priceless!
- COUNT R. Eer -- pardon -- what is eets price, Senor Whistelaire?
- WHISTLER One hundred guineas. (silence)
- WILDE Wonderful!
- ED. Unique!
- FRED Tremendous!
- ED. Wonderful!
- FRED Unique!
- WILDE Tremendous!
- DU M'IER (with his eye on the count) In a few years it will be worth a fortune!
- COUNT R. I will buy eet for my leetle friend... How long did eet take you to paint thees picture, senor Whistelaire?
- WHISTLER I ----- (hand suspended in mid air)
- ED. (hand also suspended in mid air) Master worked a whole day and a half on it.
- FRED (ditto) A day and a half.
- COUNT R. But -- one hundred guineas for only one day and a half?
- WHISTLER It took me twenty years to learn to paint that picture

- in one day and a half.
- COUNT R. BUT one hundred --
- WHISTLER My posthumous price.
- DUM M'IER And cheap at it, too!
- COUNT R. (scratching his head) Ah, I give eet up! Give eet to me.
- WHISTLER Parcel up the nocturne for the Count.
- ED. )  
FRED) Yes, master. (they fasten draps round picture)
- COUNT R. And now eet is I must say how you do do. Eet has been extreme unction to meet you all. (bows) Senor Whistleaire, eef you would attend me to the door -- there is a leetle matter of that cheque.
- DU M'IER (aside to Whistler) Oh, don't let it be a little matter, Jimmie.
- COUNT RL And I must ask you for the name of that last wine -- I sink my leetle seeck friend would like eet.
- WHISTLER By all menas, Count. Dibbs, go down into the cellar and bring up a bottle of wine, one with the yellow seal, for Count Rudello. And, Dibbs, bring up another with the blue seal. (to Count) You haven't tasted the blue. Place them in Count Rudello's carriage.
- DIBBS Yes sir.
- COUNT R. The blue! Ah! I see you have a repertoire. (slaps Whistler on the back and is following him gaily to the door when he slips) Ah, ah, those wine, my mouth air too many for my feet, I think.
- WHISTLER (holding him up) No, no, Count, you're alflight. It's all the fault of my confounded teetotal architect. (they exit amid laughter. Felicity lingers by the painting, drawing aside the cover)
- LADY M. Well, he certainly deserves a hundred pounds for having any friend of that American hussy's to breakfast. Disgusting! Count Rudello is obviously suffering from middle age. And as for your saying that artists have no commercial sense, Thomas, I think a man who can sell pictures could sell anything.
- WILDE We say the artist has no head for business -- and really meant he public has no taste for art, dear lady.
- WOODBEE You can't blame the public -- we have no art today -- it's not like the eighteenth century. There were artists then. As for the picture, he sold it because Whistlers are becoming fashionable.
- LADY M. Of course he's the fashion. That's why we're here. But Count Rudello can't have r ad what Mr. Ruskin says of Mr. Whistler's paintings, or he would never have paid so much for one.
- ED. Ruskin is an old fogey.
- FRED Master said so.
- DU M'IER Hear, hear!
- LADY M. (to Coppie) Oh you BELONG to the new generation. But you'll never get anyone over forty to believe that. And if Mr. Ruskin says Mr. Whistler can't paint, very well then,

why doesn't Mr. Whistler stop it and try something that he can make a success of? (Wilde and Du Maurier laugh) But Mr. Ruskin must know. What else are critics for but to know?

- WOODBEE By jove, dear Lady Meed, there's a lot in what you say.
- DU M'IER Yes, sound and fury.
- ED. Master says everyone who knows, knows that Ruskin doesn't know.
- FRED. Master says Ruskin is for the museum... Master is a genius.
- DU M'IER Yes, that's just it. Jimmie is merely a genius therefore Ruskin is loaded with honor —
- WILDE Well, Jimmie is loaded with debt — it's a fig from fortune that he sold that picture.
- LADY M. If Mr. Whistler is poor, I'm sure it's nobody's fault but his own. To insist on painting what he likes, instead of what the public likes — it shows great stubbornness —
- WILDE It may show taste, dear lady.
- DU M'IER AND you know, posterity proves the artist to be right.
- LADY M. (undaunted) That's just what I'd expect of posterity. The younger generation is always wilful. But Mr. Whistler won't be living after he's dead and now is the time to woo success. (exits to balcony with Woodbee, fanning vigorously)
- DU M'IER (looking after her and laughing) Pshaw! (Whistler returns from L. Stuffing cheque into pocket and looking mightily pleased)
- WILDE Well, the Count succumbed to your Art, Jimmie.
- WHISTLER No, no, rather to my wine. (laughter)
- ED. Ah, you are always discovering new wines, master.
- WHISTLER I don't discover them — I create them. Ha-ha! with the aid of Dibbs and a little sealing wax — of various colours. (laughter)
- DU M'IER (at easel) So this is your latest offspring?
- WHISTLER Conceived on Friday; born and christened yesterday; sold to a giddy bibber of wines today. (standing back viewing canvas whimsically) Do you know, if I didn't know who painted it I'd say the chap certainly knew what he was about! Ha-ha!
- FELICITY (softly) It is beautiful.
- WHISTLER (eagerly) Would you like it, Miss Ecks, would you? (Woodbee re-appears at balcony door)
- FELICITY But it is sold.
- WHISTLER Oh, never mind that. A thing that can be given should never be sold. (Dibbs enters and proceeds to carry off picture) Stop. Don't take it, Dibbs.
- DIBBS The Count, Sir, he is waiting for it outside in his carriage.
- WHISTLER (giving him the cheque) Ha-ha! Here, return him his old cheque... And if he says anything, tell him I'll send him a bill for the wine!



- DIBBS            Yes sir.
- FELICITY        (still softly) Oh, thank you! (Woodbee comes forward officiously)
- WOODBEE        Ahem! (to Felicity) I would like you to see one or two of my latest little things — I have them on show at the gallery of British Artists.
- WHISTLER       (taunting gaily) So you conform to the standards of the B.A.'s. That is most precious of you, Thomas.
- WOODBEE        (tartly) It is a pity some others cannot conform —
- WHISTLER       (brightly) But is only the dying who conform, for they conform to the past — the dead.
- WOODBEE        At all events they come to the top.
- WHISTLER       No, no; they come to the surface but not to the top. They conform nicely to the levels of mediocrity.
- WOODBEE        (pointing to Wilde) I don't know what you think, Oscar, but I consider British art to be the greatest in the world.
- WHISTLER       (before Wilde can reply) Oscar is an aesthete — he will say the greatest art in the world is Greek. (wagging first finger) How often am I to tell you that art has no country — not even Greece! It happens wherever the artist is, and then belongs to everybody.
- FELICITY        And what is art, Mr. Whistler?
- WHISTLER        Beauty — truth — as I see it.
- FELICITY        And what is truth?
- WHISTLER        (smiling into her eyes) I have never yet been at the bottom of a well! (offering her his arm) But, if you will come with me, I will endeavour to prove to Beauty that she and Truth are one and the same. Eh... Ah, pardon me, my waistcoat has come unfastened. (Endeavouring to do it up and finding buttons missing) Ha-ha! so I have no buttons, it seems! (escorts Felicity towards balcony, Woodbee stares after them)
- DU M'IER       (to Woodbee) So they asked you to exhibit, Thomas?
- WOODBEE        (mollified) yes; oh, well, I suppose everyone has his day.
- WHISTLER       (turning at door, twinkling mischievously) Make the most of it — you'll be a long time forgotten!
- WOODBEE        (furiously) No doubt you wish you had as much.
- WHISTLER       (with provocative calm) No — no; you should know I have all posterity before me. I am too new for your Academicians, they are never in at the birth of the idea, only at the death. (exits grandly, Felicity still on his arm) (The Coppies have hastily and as they hope, secretly, done up their waistcoats. Lady Meed hesitates, then follows Felicity)
- WILDE           (to the Coppies, pointing at their waistcoats) Fashion Changed?
- ED. & FRED     Eh!!... I must cover the picture again. (they both rush the easel)
- DU M'IER       (still at easel) Has Jimmie any money at all?
- ED.             Well, he hadn't last night.
- FRED.           His loan to Oscar exhausted his cash.

- WILDE One doesn't need cash when one has credit, and our dear Jimmie will always have credit while he has audacity ... Well, I must wait away. The weather is bound to change at any moment now, and then (touching his buttonhole and fixing his eye on the confused Coppies) my buttonhole, and not my waistcoat, would be out of season. (crosses to balcony door) Farewell, dear Lady and dear, dear Miss Ecks. That we meet again soon must be my one prayer. Adieu, Jimmie --- Thomas! (The others murmur farewells.) Whistler comes in from balcony. Wilde begins the ceremony of donning his cape
- WHISTLER Not going?
- WILDE I must. I scarcely have time for luncheon before I am due at Lady Smiths in order to be inoculated with that fashionable English disease called "Afternoon tea".
- WHISTLER It is very contagious.
- DU M'IER Well, goodbye Jimmie. Remember tomorrow night.
- WHISTLER (snapping his fingers) Oh, George old chap, I had forgotten our arrangement. Miss Ecks has just asked me to dine at her Aunt's tomorrow.
- DU M'IER And you are going?
- WHISTLER On air!
- DU M'IER Then I will wait a while now. I want to speak to you! (Woodbee moves closer in order to listen)
- WHISTLER George, she's going to sit for me. I will make a study in cream and rose. isn't she ---?
- DU M'IER She is!
- WHISTLER (ecstatically) Ah, George, do you know how it feels to suddenly discover all of life's beauty and serenity in one human soul? It's like finding the whole sunrise in a tapestry, the rainbow in a moonbeam, all colour and fragrance of the garden in one little ---
- DU M'IER (interrupting the flow) We've all dreamed that dream, Jimmie. Be careful you don't wake up.
- WILDE Marriage will awaken him, and then give him permanent insomnia. (goes) (Whistler laughs and waves him out, then turns to the Coppies who are covering the picture and at that moment drop it)
- WHISTLER How like you! (Picks up picture and accidentally knocks it over again) How unlike me! (The brothers pick up the picture) Wait, I have some straps which should be the very thing! (hurries into bedroom R.) (Lady Meed and Felicity return from balcony)
- FELICITY I think Mr. Whistler is most generous, Aunt. He is going to paint my portrait, too.
- LADY M. Oh, he's flattering you at present. Wait until you feel that brain of his. I think Mr. Whistler was very rude to you just now, Thomas.
- WOODBEE I am used to his vanity.
- LADY M. That's just it, he's vain. Like all artists --- he's so possessed by his own superiority that he won't even allow other people condescend to him.
- WOODBEE. By jove, Lady Meed, there is a lot in what you say.

- LADY M. That's why he refuses to be guided by public opinion -- even when it's Mr. Ruskin.
- ED. Oh, la la! Master has not only refused to be guided by Mr. Ruskin, but he has chided Mr. Ruskin.
- FRED And now they are to fight it out in the arena at Westminster.
- LADY M. (outraged) A court case! You don't mean to say Mr. Whistler is to be a court case?
- ED. Yes, and Mr. Ruskin is to be a hospital case. (fred nods)
- LADY M. Thomas, is this true?
- WOODBEE Quite true. (going eagerly to her) What are you going to do?
- LADY M. Felicity, we must leave this house at once. (murmurs from all but Woodbee) I refuse to associate or allow you to associate with a man who deliberately makes himself notorious.
- FELICITY But Aunt --
- LADY M. I insist by right of my authority. You will leave this house immediately. Now, miss, please keep your poise, otherwise I shall have hysterics. I feel them coming on.
- DU MAURIER Jimmie has merely sued Ruskin for libel, but it will be quite all right, I assure you.
- LADY M. no scandal can ever be quite all right, Mr. Du Maurier. Come Felicity. Thomas, will you kindly escort us to the carriage?
- WOODBEE Certainly, as you wish to go.
- LADY M. I do. Felicity, at once!
- ED. I will go too.
- FRED And I. (Lady Hood, talking above Felicity, sweeps her out L.) (Woodbee and the Coppies in her wake) (Du Maurier left alone gazes a ter the exodus)
- DU MAURIER Pahew! (Whistler, carrying straps, comes in, happily)
- WHISTLER Here they are, Ed, Fred! What, the boys gone?
- DU MAURIER Yes.
- WHISTLER Then there's nothing else for it but to do my own work, myself. (kneels to strap picture)
- DU MAURIER Jimmie, I want a word with you.
- WHISTLER Then make it a one syllable one, old chap. They say love is blind -- but it has made me deaf.
- DU MAURIER Oh, it 's not about MissEcks -- She'll speak for herself.
- WHISTLER In a voice that is like a bird's song!
- DU MAURIER Haydon said yesterday that if ever he had to part with either his collection of Whistler's or Rembrandts, the Rembrandts should go first. That's what people who know think of your work.
- WHISTLER People -- not professors -- any but the professors.
- DU MAURIER In that case, it's only the professors who don't matter ... Isn't it?

- WHISTLER Ha-ha! I can see you are about to offer me advice - but first allow me to proffer some to you. It is this: never--
- DU M'IER (interrupting) But with that picture, that picture you've given to that girl. --
- WHISTLER The girl, George.
- DU M'IER With that picture -- what do you care what Ruskin says? (hastily, before Whistler can interrupt) Listen, Jimmie, we were students together in Paris. All of us who were with you recognised your worth even then. We realise you are the king of us all. But it's because of your very superiority that the world is hard on you. Kings aren't recognised unless they wear a crown. Look at Armstrong, Poynter, Leighton, all starting when you did and all succeeding.
- WHISTLER Small success is so quickly found, George.
- DU M'IER Yes, but where are you? Till lately, insulted and rejected. everything you did misunderstood.
- WHISTLER It is unaccountable, but it is usual.
- DU M'IER But the tide is turning now. What the artists think of you is getting abroad. Commissions are flooding in... And, don't you see, it's just because the tide is turning that Ruskin makes this last stubborn stand, shouting out that you can't even paint. But if you'll forget it, others will soon forget it too.
- WHISTLER Too much has been forgotten in favour of critics. They write for their day. They are read in their day. And when tomorrow comes it is forgotten, in their favour, that they were wrong.
- DU M'IER Yes, but --
- WHISTLER But what fun, George, to let an artist be proved right against these ponderosities in the artist's own life-time -- for once.
- DU M'IER Ah, you imagine you can win just because you are right?
- WHISTLER (serious for a moment) No; because Ruskin, the Professor of Art, is wrong and people must recognise it.
- DU M'IER Remember, Professors are made in the people's own likeness. They will never forgive you for proving him wrong. There's nothing that is hated so much as brains -- unless it's individuality. Draw back, Jimmie, before the British Lion roars at you. To go forward is simply to put your head into the lion's mouth.
- WHISTLER What else is the lion's mouth for? I intend to fight. (finishes strapping picture with a flourish, and, jumping up, makes for the balcony)
- DU M'IER (pointing to the picture on the floor) You have a more difficult fight to engage you here. One that can only be won by you -- your work!
- WHISTLER (over his shoulder) Oh, I'm a man of many parts, not a lopsided painter. I'm tired of people advising me -- for Ruskin's good.
- DU M'IER It will ruin you!
- WHISTLER (with a flourish) If I am too tame for grand adversity (bows) then I am already dead. (exits to balcony. Returns quickly) Where is Felicity?

- DU MAURIER (wearily) She is gone. Lady Meed only heard just now that you were suing Ruskin for libel and she insisted on leaving at once.
- WHISTLER May Hell strike her with imagination!
- DU MAURIER You see? How do you see? Where will all your new commissions be when the pack hear the news?
- WHISTLER (slowly) I must go on... it is my artistic faith. But she left me a message? (Du Maurier shakes his head. Whistler rushes back to balcony door to peer into street. Dibbs enters from L. with a letter on salver)
- WHISTLER (coming dully back and speaking slowly) As a matter of fact I wouldn't be surprised to receive word at any moment to say the case has fallen through. Ruskin is ill. Funk I suppose. These critics can't bear being criticised. (seeing Dibbs) What is it, Dibbs?
- DIBBS This is the letter that came by messenger last night, sir; you said to give it to you later (Whistler looks at letter absently, then opens it hurriedly; reads, laughs and passes it to Du Maurier).
- WHISTLER Ha-ha! From the precious panjandrum's select solicitors. The case of Whistler v Ruskin is on. Look at it, George.
- DU MAURIER (reads it, then sighs) H'm! You're in for it now, Jimmie!

CURTAIN

ACT TWO.  
Scene One.

SCENE: An ante-room and Court of the Exchequer Division, Westminster. The ante-room takes up the forefront of the stage, and is divided from the Court by a large Gothic archway, with double sliding doors centre rear. At the moment these doors are closed so the court cannot be seen. As the curtain rises WHISTLER and FELICITY enter L. from street. He is glowing, exuberant. She is leaning on his arm and sinks on to a seat with a sigh.

- FELICITY At last! I had begun to fear we should never get here. That dreadful cab -- it went on and on --
- WHISTLER Well, darling, we had to keep driving in the darn cab until we ran over someone we knew who could pay for it.
- FELICITY But it makes it so expensive. A small drive mounts up to a sum in no time.
- WHISTLER Only a pound to-day. That's the advantage of knowing so many people in London... (sits) You know, Felicity, I think I am a little light-headed these days. When I think of having you, debts, court cases -- fade right away! When I look at you I can't see anything else. But that's logical, isn't it? The eye of man can't hold more than -- everything, can it? (She smiles again. He kisses her).
- FELICITY Jimmie, dear, you must win this case.

- WHISTLER (grasping her hands) Win a court case! Is that all the lady demands? Certainly I shall win this court case. Ha-ha, I shall have myriads of court cases and win them all for you!
- FELICITY But it all went so wrong yesterday. And whenever Mr. Ruskin's counsel said something particularly scathing about you, all the women in the court looked at me with a great show of pity.
- WHISTLER Never mind, darling. It is just their way of trying to feel superior.
- FELICITY But Sir John said you were a mere imposter, that you couldn't paint, that —
- WHISTLER If white could not be called black, men couldn't have law courts at all.
- FELICITY (nodding to court room) Still, I don't think they like you in there.
- WHISTLER (laughing) Of course they don't, my precious. Why should they? I am different from them, so if they like me, they must dislike themselves; for if I am allright, then they must be all wrong. And that would never do. Ha-ha, their vanity must condemn me and their reason finds reason for it. (whimsically) I fancy I've helped them a bit there.
- FELICITY That's just the trouble. Couldn't you be more tactful, Jimmie?
- WHISTLER Tact is for politicians.
- FELICITY But you can win people when you wish to. Why won't you adapt a little — you follow the fashion in dress —
- WHISTLER (smiling) Well, you know; one must dress the joke. And then I don't follow the fashion — I create it! In foolishness one must never be content with half measures. And, as people insist on life being a parade, then for me it shall be a comic one.
- FELICITY But why be so flippant?
- WHISTLER My darling, we can afford to be — it is stupidity that is so blatantly serious — in order to flatter a word that takes nothing so seriously as — stupidity. Ha-ha! Remember England expects every Englishman to be — ridiculous! (laughs)
- FELICITY (restlessly) Oh! (pleadingly) But, Jimmie, as there is a way to win them —
- WHISTLER Not for me — I'm not stupid enough! (sees she is hurt and adds tenderly) Ah, great heart, you would shower love even on the crass world. But it doesn't value love... That's why one must never depend on the world for one's happiness. Do you know how I think of us? Looked away from them all — sustained by each other. You, soft and tender — a nest of warm thoughts! Ah, my Felicity, I can fight the world, for I hate Hate; scorn Scorn; and can be harsh to harsh things and trample on mean ones. This brain is a sharp sword to combat the world, but this heart — how weak! Where I love, there all my strength flies and I am a zealot. Love must be as perfect as Art. Let the world and success go hang! We are still unconquered, still uncorrupted if we have love. But if love fails ... (his voice fails) How lovely you are! (kisses her) My sweet! (steps are heard off and Lady Need greatly excited enters R.)
- LADY M. Here you are! You're very late. Have you only just arrived? I've been waiting for you in Court. There was a most

- disgraceful case being tried. Really, not fit to listen to. You should have heard it.
- WHISTLER I must hunt up Parry to give him some advice. Excuse me. (he escapes R.)
- LADY M. (sitting) Well, have you spoken to him?
- FELICITY No; I ---
- LADY M. Slaply tell him that if he doesn't win this case and then set about behaving himself, everything is definitly ---
- FELICITY (impulsively) I can't always speak to Jimmie. He seems to overwhelm me somehow.
- LADY M. I know, I know. He has that peculiar way of saying everything he wants to say, and shouldn't; whilst at the same time preventing other people saying what they want to say, and should. It's that low cunning of the artist. I believe that man could get out of murder, and not only get out of it, but come out with distinction. (Oscar Wilde, gorgeously attired, has entered from the street L.)
- WILDE (kissing Lady Meed's hand) The trouble with Jimmie in this case with Ruskin is that Jimmie is not in the wrong. If he were, nothing could restrain his victory. (kissing Felicity's hand) Where is the warrior?
- FELICITY (rising) He is advising Sir Charles Parry. I think I will advise him what to advise him.
- WILDE Ah, the tragedy of life is that we must pay our barristers for the advice we give them. Pray allow me to escort you. Are you joining us, dear Lady Meed?
- LADY M. I will stay here in case Mr. Whistler returns. If you find him, please dispatch him to me.
- WILDE You shall receive him in good order and condition. (Wilde and Felicity go out R. they have scarcely disappeared when Whistler returns)
- WHISTLER Where is Felicity?
- LADY M. Unless you are as blind as you say you are, you must have bumped in'o her as you came out... Wait, don't go, I wish to speak to you. (sternly) Do you realize you are notorious?
- WHISTLER H'm! That's what they call it till one is dead. Then they call it fame.
- LADY M. I would be obliged if you would please show a proper seriousness.
- WHISTLER Is there a proper seriousness?
- LADY M. Why will you be so absurd?
- WHISTLER I like to delight you.
- LADY M. What are you saying, sir?
- WHISTLER I don't know. I never listen to myself for fear of being bored.
- LADY M. (sharply) Mr. Whistler, be serious.
- WHISTLER Impossible to break with the traditions of a lifetime.
- LADY M. Now stop that --- please! Sit down and let us come to an

understanding. (Whistler sits -- as far away from her as possible) At first, as you know, I had intended that Felicity must never see you again. Then, when you called, I changed my mind.

- WHISTLER (lightly) I congratulate you! I would, too, if I had one like yours.
- LADY M. What are you saying now, sir?
- WHISTLER I'm saying that I agreed with you -- you might get one like mine -- a mind.
- LADY M. Really, Mr. Whistler, the way you insult people to their faces ---
- WHISTLER Saves me insulting their faces behind their backs.
- LADY M. If you weren't nearly a relation --
- WHISTLER The closer the bond, the wider the breach, eh?
- LADY M. I suppose you know what you're talking about. Ah! don't tell me. I never listen to explanations.
- WHISTLER And I never make them. (pause)
- LADY M. Of course you will win this case ---
- WHISTLER Shall I?
- LADY M. Well won't you?
- WHISTLER (gaily) Now, now, now I asked you first.
- LADY M. Really, Mr. Whistler!
- WHISTLER (innocently) Yes, really and truly!
- LADY M. Oh, you are impossible! What I am trying to tell you is that after you have won this case there may still be some hope for you. I was talking to that little poet, Mr. Swinbourne, at the Savoy yesterday, and he said that you and Velasquez will have the greatest names in the history of modern art.
- WHISTLER (fixing his eyeglass and drawling) True, dear lady, but why drag in Velasquez? (Voices are heard off L. Whistler rises and crosses to doorway. Felicity and Wilde re-enter from R. as Du Maurier, Woodbee and the Coppies appear at L. Woodbee goes to Felicity; and the others cluster round Whistler L.)
- FELICITY Ah, here you are, Jimmie!
- WHISTLER (waving to her) Ah, there you come, Felicity. (to all) Well, today endeth the fight between the Brush and the Pen and will decide whether artists may paint what they choose or merely what is allowed. (the Coppies wag their heads)
- WOODBEE Then you should brush up your solicitor, Jimmie. The other side dealt you some nasty daubs yesterday.
- WILDE Yes, rather! ..... Is Ruskin here?
- ED. Oh, yes, his first appearance is promised for to-day.
- LADY M. No; Lady Burne-Jones told me that although he has quite recovered from his illness, the doctors will not allow him to attend the court.
- WILDE But I thought you said he'd recovered from his breakdown.



- LADY M. Oh, yes, he's fully recovered.
- WHISTLER H'm! A caricature of a recovery. Ed., you might go in and see how quickly time is flying.
- ED. Happily, master. (cross off R.)
- WHISTLER (to Du Maurier under cover of the other's talk) George, old chap, I have a favour for you to do for me. Could you offer me a little loan? The fact is, I wish to pay for a carriage I have to hire.
- DU MAURIER (feeling in his pocket) Why, by all means, Jimmie. (finds nothing) Eh! you don't need it at the moment, do you? I'll have to procure some change. But I'll fix you up before you go.
- WHISTLER Thanks, George. (smiling) You know a loan in time saves us borrowing. (Ed. re-enters hurriedly)
- ED. Fortunately our seats are reserved or we could never get in. The place is crowded to over-flowing; even the corridors are crammed.
- WOODBEE (near Felicity) But for a person like Jimmie who makes a hobby of notoriety —
- WHISTLER It is nits and nectar, of course. (taking Felicity's hand and drawing her away from Woodbee) Give me your little hand and your largest blessing, my dear. (to all) Come, let us to the court! (with Felicity on his arm he crosses to doors at centre back. As he is about to open them, Lady Mead intercepts him)
- LADY M. Mr. Whistler, if you really wish to win this case (Whistler nods) then make a direct appeal to the jury. Tell them how deeply you regret the fact that your work has failed to please Mr. Ruskin, but that you consider yourself due for compensation for, since Mr. Ruskin published his criticism, the sales of your pictures have fallen to nothing.
- DU MAURIER (slapping his knee) Upon my soul her lady-ship is right, Jimmie, you must appeal to the great British conscience — in other words — to their supreme sense of L.S.D.
- LADY M. Really, Mr. Du Maurier, as we are discussing Justice, I think you might leave morality out of it.
- WHISTLER Yes, yes, George. This great race has no need of morality — we have convention! (he pushes doors. Immediately the murmurs of the court can be heard. Turning in the doorway, he says with a flourish) Remember, tonight you dine with me to celebrate my victory! But now come in, come in, an exhibition will be held. (and sweeps out with Felicity followed by first the Coppies, then Wilde and Woodbee)
- LADY M. No doubt, Mr. Whistler is being very clever, but if he continues that manner in court he will be made pay for it.
- DU MAURIER Do you then suggest that the judge may be prejudiced, dear lady?
- LADY M. Of course the judge is prejudiced. All judges are prejudiced. If they hadn't prejudice to guide them, how could they judge? It isn't given to man to be infallible. (She disappears with Du Maurier as the curtain drops. The babble of the court swells and continues as the curtain rises again immediately to reveal the court beyond the wide centre doors brilliantly lit. Whistler is in the witness box centre back facing the audience. Near him can be seen the Attorney General, a regular old cross-patch, and an Officer of the Court. The others though heard need not be seen.)

- OFFICER OF COURT  
ATTY. GEN.      Silence! (murmurs slowly die down. Silence)  
                  Now, Mr. Whistler,
- WHISTLER        (Facing as though the audience were the jury) Sirs, I have been awarded a gold medal at the Hague; my etchings are in the British Museum and Windsor Castle collections. Last year I was invited by Sir Coutts Lindsay to exhibit at the Grosvenor Gallery. I exhibited eight pictures. All, save one had been sold before being hung. Strangely enough it is the one which is still for sale that has displeased Mr. Ruskin --- (laughter)
- OFFICER        Silence!
- WHISTLER        (continuing) --- it is the one still for sale that has displeased Mr. Ruskin so greatly that he has written this of it; "I have heard and seen much of cockney impudence before now, but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public face". (murmurs) Since neither Velasquez nor Rembrandt can find favour with this -- er -- with Mr. Ruskin, I am quite content that he should think poorly of my own work. But he does not support his personal opinion with any technical criticism. What, then, I ask are his qualifications? True, I hear that our economists consider Mr. Ruskin to be the complete critic. But when Mr. Ruskin goes outside the province of the Art critic to endeavour to cheapen the value of my painting, I -- as an artist --- find Mr. Ruskin a complete economist!
- DU M'IER        (off) Bravo! (laughter)
- ATTY GEN.        Regarding the pictures you exhibited, Mr. Whistler, why do you call the portrait of Mr. Henry Irving "an arrangement in black"? (a single laugh)
- WHISTLER        As may be presumed it is the picture, not Mr. Irving, which is the arrangement. (laughter)
- OFFICER        Silence!
- WHISTLER        All these works are impressions of my own.
- ATTY GEN.        I take it you expect them to be criticised?
- WHISTLER        Certainly, and not to heed criticism till it comes to a case of this kind.
- ATTY. GEN.        I suppose you are willing to admit that your pictures exhibit some eccentricity?
- WHISTLER        Some people call it originality (laughter)
- ATTY. GEN.        (giving order) Er --- would you hold that first picture up, so that the gentlemen of the jury may see it. (The picture is held aloft by the officer of the court. Murmurs) Is this the picture which Mr. Ruskin adversely criticised?
- WHISTLER        It is. Though I am not responsible for the frame and its astonishments of plush and varied gildings. And may I suggest, in passing, that the picture would be better appreciated if not held upside down. (laughter. The picture is hastily righted) Otherwise the gentlemen of the jury would have to stand up on their heads to view it. (laughter)
- OFFICER        Silence!
- ATTY. GEN.        And it is for this picture, the labour of one and a half days, you ask two hundred guineas?
- WHISTLER        No; I ask it for the knowledge of a lifetime. (some laughter)

Loud applause)

- ATTY. GEN. Do you think that anybody looking at that picture might fairly come to the conclusion that it has no particular beauty?
- WHISTLER I have strong evidence that Mr. Ruskin did come to that conclusion (laughter)
- ATTY. GEN. Do you think it fair that Mr. Ruskin should come to that conclusion?
- WHISTLER What might be fair to Mr. Ruskin I cannot answer. No artist of culture would come to that conclusion.
- ATTY. GEN. Mr. Ruskin is a Slade Professor and has devoted his long life to art.
- WHISTLER That suffices not. A life passed among pictures makes not a painter — else the policeman in the National Gallery might assert himself. As well allege that he who lives in a library must needs die a poet. (some laughter)
- ATTY. GEN. Then you mean, Mr. Whistler, that those initiated in technical matters would have no difficulty in understanding your work. But do you think now that you could make us see the beauty of that picture?
- WHISTLER (slowly) Would you mind turning your — er — face to the light in order that I may more clearly perceive it?  
(pause. Crowd titters)
- ATTY. GEN. (irritably) Well, well?
- WHISTLER (with a sigh) No. Now that I have the light upon you I feel it would be as hopeless as for a musician to pour his notes into the ear of a deaf man. (laughter)
- OFFICER Silence!
- ATTY. GEN. Ahem! .... You will admit that Mr. Ruskin holds perhaps the highest position in Europe and America as an art critic. His discovery of such artists as Turner and Giotto, have —
- WHISTLER (interrupting) H'm. Turner was a full blown R.A. and Giotto has been accepted for a mere incident of centuries before Mr. Ruskin — er — "discovered" them.
- ATTY. GEN. Ahem! (giving order) There is another picture there for the jury's inspection. Kindly hold it aloft.
- A JURYMEN (loudly from the audience) Oh, come, we've had enough of these Whistlers. (Murmurs of jury agreement. Nevertheless the picture comes to view)
- ATTY. GEN. (triumphantly) Well, Mr. Whistler, do you call that a good picture?
- WHISTLER (reverently) I do. A very good picture. (laughter)
- ATTY. GEN. (smugly) Do you consider many would agree with your opinion?
- WHISTLER All men of knowledge, of taste. All men of imagination. All men of soul.
- ATTY. GEN. Your modesty is rather embarrassing, Mr. Whistler — to others.
- WHISTLER Not modesty ——— reverence.
- ATTY. GEN. (snitefully) Ha! Then you are reverent in regard to this

- work, Mr. Whistler?
- WHISTLER As I am before all genius.
- ATTY. GEN So you acclaim its genius, do you, Mr. Whistler?
- WHISTLER I do. It is a work of immortality.
- ATTY. GEN Aha! We have an immortal in the court this morning. (laught  
Your work, Mr. Whistler, is ---
- WHISTLER (interrupting) My work? No, that particular piece is not  
my work.
- ATTY. GEN Not --- er ---
- WHISTLER Now, now, before you deride my judgement of it, I warn  
you that it has been verified for three centuries. For the  
artist has been three hundred years dead --- and is still  
living!
- ATTY. GEN Then, then --- why was this picture brought to court?
- WHISTLER By some mistake, no doubt --- like mine. (laughter)
- OFFICER Silence!
- ATTY. GEN I didn't know. ---
- WHISTLER Of course you didn't. But I know when I see one --- and  
so do many others. Gentlemen, as you no doubt perceive,  
that picture before your eyes, so justly acclaimed but  
which fails to meet with the approval of the Attorney  
General, is by the great Italian artist, the glorious, ever  
esteemed, long dead, but ever living, Titiani (loud  
laughter, and sustained applause as the curtain falls.  
When it rises, the court is NO LONGER lit and the double  
doors leading to it, are only partly open. From the court,  
in single file, enter all, except Whistler, Du Maurier  
is the first to appear)
- WOODBEE (entering) Judgment without costs! It was a foregone  
conclusion. When one man sets himself up against all  
established ---
- LADY M. (entering) I told him so. Perhaps this will teach him  
to respect custom.
- ED. (entering) Ha-ha, I thought it most marvelously funny.
- FRED. Yes, intensely absurd.
- WILDE (entering) Jimmie can always be relied upon to create  
laughter. He was a miniature Mephistophiles, mocking the  
majority. With a little more of Disraeli and a little  
less of Oliver Cromwell, he might have triumphed.
- WOODBEE (speering) He was, frankly, a very amusing show.
- LADY M. I think he could have procured a cheaper audience.
- DU MAURIER You all talk as though he was beaten. Jimmie won the case.
- WILDE Yes, and he'll never be forgiven for it.
- LADY M. Who's talking about winning the case; he lost the costs ---  
that's what counts.
- WOODBEE (with satisfaction) Well, there's nothing left for it now  
but a little bankruptcy.
- FELICITY (horror struck) Bankruptcy! Oh, I don't know what to think.

- LADY M. I do. Anyway, this should have killed his mighty faith in himself. (the doors at centre are opened wide, and Whistler appears, smiling)
- Ah!
- WHISTLER (bowing) Well, friends, my victory was a moral one and as this is a moral world, all's well with merrie Enlgnad and me! (goes to Felicity who is by her aunt)
- WILDE A farthing damages, now you will be able to pay your debts!
- WOODBEE After he's paid for his victory. (Whistler talks to Felicity)
- DU MAURIER (slapping Woodbee on the back so that he jumps) Well, Thomas, I see you are exhibiting again. That bunch of grapes of yours, quite good; quite a la Jimmie's palette.
- WOODBEE (stiffly but pleased) Eh, without his eccentricities, I hope.
- DU MAURIER Oh to be sure, without the Whistler touch — oh, certainly! Still, it's quite good. (Woodbee looks at him suspiciously) Eh, I mean it's neat, sweet, inoffensive — oh, confound it all! — what I mean to say is, could you oblige me with a lit — a big loan. I have to pay for a house I wish to rent.
- WOODBEE A house?
- DU MAURIER Well, it's really a terrace of houses. (Woodbee takes out roll of notes and begins to select one or two.) (grabbing roll) Thanks, old chap, thanks. That painting was really very much like Jimmie's — you owe him a great deal.
- WOODBEE I fail to understand you — (Du. M. waves him off and crosses to Whistler)
- WHISTLER (to Felicity) Let me see the smiles break through the clouds, my dear. (Du. M. surreptitiously slips the notes into his hand. Whistler looks at them; then draws Du M. aside) But George, this is too much, far too much.
- DU MAURIER No, no, no keep it. There's loads more where that came from.
- WHISTLER (extracting one note and slyly slipping the roll into Du Maurier's pocket) Well, I'm glad things are coming easily to you.
- DU MAURIER Oh, yes, it was very easy.
- FELICITY Do take us home now, Jimmie.
- WHISTLER Surely! Fred, please call me a cab.
- FRED Happily master (exit L.)
- FELICITY Let us go at once!
- WHISTLER Yes. Come, everybody! Remember you all dine with me to-night to celebrate my victory! (They all exit L. Lady Meed talking to Felicity. Whistler is the last to leave. He looks round the scene and shrugs, then goes out quickly. Beatrice Godwin, a charming and sympathetic woman, enters quickly at centre)
- BEATRICE Mr. Whistler, Mr. Whistler!

- WHISTLER (returning) Who's that?
- BEATRICE Only me — Beatrice Godwin — I was your pupil in Paris — remember? I just wanted to tell you that I heard the case and how unjust I consider the verdict. Unjust!
- WHISTLER It is like all public verdicts.
- BEATRICE Ah, surely not. (smiling) You are still a cynic!
- WHISTLER Cynic! (gently, but with feeling) If I were a cynic, could I ever do my work my way, in a world like this — where one is all but tortured for it? .... Dear lady, never doubt but that the artist lives by faith (quickly, with a light gesture) Ga-hai and I shall have precious little more to live on after this — the costs are so costly!
- BEATRICE Forgive me! I had been about to say that cynicism is cowardice. How foolish of me — when we have always admired your courage in holding to the high way.
- WHISTLER (smiling) Admired?
- BEATRICE (warmly) That is all that is left for us others to do — to admire those who win to the thing we but aim at. I suppose that is why, above all men, artists are envied and loved?
- WHISTLER (thoughtfully) Those of them that are dead — yes! ... Remember always that the highest names we love and revere now, were once the despised and rejected of their day. That is why I say all public verdicts are unjust.
- BEATRICE I hadn't thought.... But, oh, it is true. Brutally true! (gently) I hate to know you have all this worry of debts, and —
- WHISTLER (with affected gaiety) Worry? Me? My creditors do the worrying! (seriously) But don't grieve your generous heart about wayward issues. Wait! Time is kind — every ugly angle comes round in the end! — Time turns all corners. (smiling) And, think of it! — artists are the ones who can afford to wait — for Time is on our side.
- BEATRICE Ah!..... (smiles, holding out both hands) To Time, then! (Whistler takes her hands and shakes them slowly as the Coppies appear at L.)
- WHISTLER To Time and to Beatrice Godwin!
- ED. The horses are growing impatient, master.
- WHISTLER We shall meet again — (impulsively) tonight! You are coming home with me to celebrate my victory! (Still holding her hands and laughing, he backs out drawing her—resisting, but smiling after him)

CURTAIN

ACT TWO - SCENE 2.

- SCENE: Whistler's house the same night. Same as Act 1. The banquet is over. Lady Meed, Felicity, Beatrice, Woodbee, The Coppies, Wilde and Whistler still linger at the table. All wear evening dress. Wilde is conspicuous in knee-breeches and silk stockings and a gilded lily in his button-hole. Dibbs and two other men in livery, hover in the background.

- VOICES           A toast!   A Toast!
- WILDE           (rising, with glass held aloft) Ladies pretty and gentlemen witty -- a toast -- before we depart! (All rise, holding glasses high)
- May Jimmie be  
                  to posterity  
                  the illustrious elf  
                  he is to -- himself! (laughter. All drink)
- BEATRICE        Your toast, Mr. Whistler.
- WHISTLER       (jumping on to his chair) Another, another -- to wash down the other! (glasses are filled and raised again)
- WHISTLER        There once was a poet named Wilde  
                  who was really as tame as a child;  
                  though he bristled with wit,  
                  it was due -- all of it!  
                  to one Whistler -- the modest and mild! (Bows, amidst laughter)  
                  And now, sweet folk, if you have dined and wined to your content, I would like to show you the present view from the balcony. One of the Almighty's pot-boilers -- it is quite as beautiful as a Japanese fan. (All rise. Woodbee crosses to balcony doors)
- WOODBEE        Superb moonrise!
- WILDE            Oh, Jimmie wouldn't like it -- unless he painted it. And, if he were painting it, he'd swear at the moon for rising. (laughter)
- LADY M.         Well, really, Mr. Whistler, I must say I never see a moonrise like the ones you paint.
- WHISTLER       (quickly) Ah, don't you wish you could?
- WOODBEE        I, on the contrary, have seen many such moonrises.
- WHISTLER       (fixing his eyeglass and drawling) Ah, yes, nature is slowly creeping up. (Lady Mead, Felicity, Beatrice, Du Maurier, Woodbee and Whistler exit to balcony. Wilde and the Coppies sit again and drink. The liveried men clear the table. Dibbs lingers by the balcony door and endeavours to attract Whistler's attention)
- WILDE            Three servants --- his credit must be increasing!
- ED.             Servants? don't you know they're bailiffs -- master had to put them to some use.
- DIBBS           (to men) Mr. Whistler is coming now. (Whistler appears at centre)
- WHISTLER        You wish to speak to me, Dibbs?
- DIBBS            It's the bailiffs, sir.
- WHISTLER       (drawing man down stage) Well, my man, what is it? (The second man pauses in his work to listen)
- 1ST BLF         I was just thinkin' that as we is oblonging you by waiting on table, you might spare a little in advance --
- WHISTLER        It is kind of you to attend such tedious affairs. But, you know, if I could afford to keep you I would do without you.
- 1ST BLF         But, what is to become of me wife an' me fam'ly if I don't get me wages?

- WHISTLER Ha-ha! You must ask those who sent you here to answer that question.
- 1ST BLF Really, Mr. Whistler, I need the money.
- WHISTLER Oh, ho! Have a man in yourself!
- 1ST BLF I'm too poor to go up Carey Street. It's the rich wot have the bankruptcies.
- WHISTLER (thoughtfully) That is true! How long do you expect to be the man in possession?
- 1ST BLF That depends on when you pay Mr. Leyland's account.
- WHISTLER H'm! Then I'm afraid your stay will be a lengthy one. Awkward for me but, perhaps, more so for you. As for your wife and children, there's a little canvas in my bedroom — (turns R.) you might dispose of that.
- 1ST BLF No fear — I'm not taking any!
- WHISTLER (halting) Of course you're not taking it. I'm giving it to you. (turns aside as the second bailiff approaches)
- 2ND BLF Oh, Mr. Whistler, there's a little matter I'd like ter speak about.
- WHISTLER Be brief, then, for my friends are waiting.
- 2ND BLF That's just the trouble, sir, they're waiting. As yer know, I obliged yer be leavin' the suite till the dinner was over. But I'd like to remove it now.
- WHISTLER Oh, no, please! You must wait until my guests have gone. There are ladies present and seeing you remove the furniture they sat on, would offend their — er — delicate susceptibilities. (men exclaim) But don't wait wearily when you can wait merrily. Entertain yourselves. (beckons Dibbs) Dibbs, take this key — it is the key to the wine cupboard — and see these good fellows have enough to drink. (To 1st bailiff) If it's the rich who have the bankruptcies, it's the poor who have the thirst.
- 1ST BLF (grinning) Thank yer, Mr. Wiggler.
- 2ND BLF You're a toffi (they go out L. with Dibbs. Du Maurier and Beatrice come in from balcony)
- WILDE Ah, Jimmie, don't talk to me about the privations of the poor. But tell me of the privations of men of genius and I could weep tears of —
- WHISTLER (snatching his glass, to hold it aloft) Shem pain! (sets down glass and exits to balcony)
- WILDE (laughs good naturedly) Well now I will drink champagne! (he does so)
- BEATRICE (standing before picture) Did Mr. Whistler paint all these pictures?
- DU M'IER Everyone. He always says he is there — in them — for those who can find him.
- BEATRICE (slowly) For those who can find him! George, tell me, are there other pictures in the other rooms?
- DU M'IER Millions. But (nodding towards the balcony) aren't you going to join the moonstruck?
- BEATRICE Not just yet. They won't miss me. (crossing to door R.)



- I'm going to slip away, through this door — to — to explore. (she goes)
- DU M'IER      And I'm going home — Jimmie will understand. (he opens the door for her, then turns, waves to Wilde and the Coppies and goes out up left by way of the stairs. Lady Meed and Woodbee stroll in from balcony and sit on settee)
- WOODBEE      Believe me, dear Lady Meed, I mean what I say. As your niece won't have me I will never look at another woman.
- WILDE      (rising and crossing to them) And if she does have you — what then? (the Coppies laugh) That is the tragedy of marriage. Before one marries, it is so difficult to choose. But immediately after one is married, one meets at least half a dozen women one should have met before. (Woodbee rises and crosses to drinks)
- LADY M.      (cooly. Behind her fan) Now, now, Mr. Wilde, you said I was the only woman.
- WILDE      Indeed, yes, one of the only women, dear lady.
- LADY M.      And, the others?
- WILDE      Lucrezia Borgia — really there are so many people deserving of poison! Then there are, Joan of Arc; and the first of the suffragettes, Queen Elizabeth. And, now a little more ambrosia! (Ed. brings him his glass of wine. He takes it) Ah, thank you. Give me the luxuries and anybody can have the necessities! (toasting Lady Meed) To the most beautiful woman in London! (Whistler and Felicity have come in from balcony)
- WHISTLER      (smiling) Ah, Oscar always makes love to the ladies — it safeguards him from their malice.
- LADY M.      Really, James, I was just thinking what a dazzling young man Mr. Wilde is.
- WHISTLER      H'm yes; (adjusting his glass and turning to view Wilde as Wilde crosses from settee to place his glass on the table) Dazzled by my brilliancy! (laughter)
- WOODBEE      It must be time to go.
- WHISTLER      Come; a stirrup-cup before we part! (fills several glasses)
- LADY M.      Really, Mr. Whistler, you go too far.
- WHISTLER      (handing out drinks) Not at all — I merely infer that Oscar is lazy and therefore lives on other people's wits.
- LADY M.      (beaming at Wilde) Well, even if he does — he has time to grow out of it.
- WHISTLER      The sponge does not grow into a fountain. (crosses to settee with glass of wine for Lady Meed)
- LADY M.      (taking wine and speaking in lowered tones) I object to your speaking as you did, Mr. Whistler, Mr. Wilde does not, as you infer, make love to women — he is an Englishman; not like you wild artists and Frenchmen who can never forget that women are women.... English women like to meet men as comrades — without thought of sex.
- WHISTLER      Then you are to be congratulated, dear lady, certainly you do succeed, as no others could, in obliging us men to forget your sex.
- LADY M.      (loudly) Ah, you have the manners of the French — all on the surface.

- WHISTLER (lightly) Surely, a very good place to have them.
- WILDE Not at all -- they are so easily rubbed off.
- LADY M. Well, Mr. Whistler, perhaps you could exercise your French by fetching me my cloak; or -- I fancy I left it on the balcony.
- WHISTLER (over his shoulder to Woodbee) Er, Thomas, you're a linguist, Lady Meed's cloak -- will you? (sits at ease on settee at far end from Lady Meed. Woodbee glares then exits -- not too heartily)
- FELICITY I know where it is. (she follows Woodbee. Wilde and the Coppies converse)
- LADY M. And, now, before I go -- have you considered your position.
- WHISTLER Tell me -- what do you think of my new servants?
- LADY M. (mollified) Frankly, I was surprised to find things so flourishing. Three servants -- and all most attentive.
- WHISTLER (dryly) H'm! Yes; nothing would induce them to leave me I can assure you.
- LADY M. Well, I don't know how you manage it -- considering all your creditors must be aware you lost the case.
- WHISTLER Pardon me, dear lady, I won the case.
- LADY M. H'm! You won't think so when you find no one buying your pictures. Lady Burne-Jones tells me that your two latest commissions have cancelled their sittings and have interviewed her husband in regard to portraits. After all he is "hung"!
- WHISTLER H'm! -- they may now hang Burne-Jones; but, really, soon they'll want to burn Jones's pictures.
- LADY M. Have you seen the letters to the "Times" this morning -- full of sympathy for Mr. Ruskin.
- WHISTLER He needs it!
- LADY M. The Fine Art's Society is getting up a subscription to pay his costs. Burne-Jones headed the list.
- WHISTLER That is the best of having money -- people will always give you more. Well, I'll subscribe the farthing damages.
- ED. (over his shoulder) Ah, well, master, as Thomas says, the Bankruptcy Court can pay your costs.
- WHISTLER (quickly) Er? ... Ah, I must thank him for the generous thought.
- LADY M. They say Mr. Ruskin insists on resigning from the Slade Professorship.
- WHISTLER That won't cure him -- he was born a professor.
- LADY M. As I said to Lady Burne-Jones, I don't see why Mr. Ruskin should resign. After all, he was only criticising you in order to do good to Art.
- WHISTLER Yes; the critics are all doing good to Art. Poor Art! what a sad state the slut must be in if these gentlemen help her.
- LADY M. Well, of course, there is no art at all today. But what I fail to perceive is, why you always set your mind in

- opposition to Mr. Buskin; especially when they say the poor man has mental trouble.
- WHISTLER I'm glad it is becoming recognised.
- LADY M. I don't know what you mean. But of course, you realise that after all this notoriety you are no fit match for Felicity. (silence) Well, don't you? Once and for all what are your intentions concerning my niece?
- WHISTLER (confidentially) Far too intimate for discussion. (Lady Meed registers haughty surprise) (Whistler nods) I give you my word!
- LADY M. (rising) You're impossible. I've always said you were impossible and you are impossible. (Felicity and Woodbee return with her cloak) Thank you, Thomas! Felicity, are you ready?
- FELICITY You forget, Aunt, that Jimmie has asked me to stay for my portrait.
- LADY M. You will come with me. The daylight is gone — it is far too late to paint now.
- WHISTLER (hastily) No, no, no, no, not at all! How else could I paint the shadows but for the night? (the Coppies wag their heads)
- ED. Master was the first artist to paint the night.
- FRED The very first.
- LADY M. Very well, then. (Pointedly) You will finish the portrait at this sitting, Mr. Whistler. Felicity, I will expect you with Thomas in one hour.
- FELICITY Yes, Aunt.
- LADY M. You don't mind waiting, Thomas?
- WOODBEE Not at all, I shall return her safely home to you, Lady Meed; in one hour. (Whistler glares)
- WILDE (as they walk towards door L) You're staying then, Thomas, Ah, well — there's safety in numbers.
- WHISTLER And boredom.
- WILDE By Jove, Jimmie, I wish I'd said that.
- WHISTLER You will, Oscar, you will! (Lady Meed and the Coppies take their departure. Wilde pauses in doorway to indicate Felicity and Woodbee who have their heads close together)
- WILDE You see, Jimmie, there is a secret conspiracy against you. What are you going to do about it?
- WHISTLER Join it! (he does so by crossing to Felicity)
- WILDE This wall paper is killing me — one of us must go. (laughs and goes. Whistler brings easel forward and places large portrait of Felicity on it — talking as he does so.)
- WHISTLER Wilde copies like a genius and invents like an amateur... The moon has still a little way to go, Thomas. ~~NO~~ doubt you would like to study it from the balcony. That last moonrise of yours — very clever, of course, but cleverness has nothing to do with Art. Besides, it was altogether too correct. Nature is not correct, Thomas, she's abandoned — lavish! And why copy nature, anyway?

It is not what nature looks like to man, but what man thinks of her looks that interests us. The camera method is used only by those who have nothing to say, for while they are busy painting in all the little unessential details, they are leaving out the one mighty essential. (taking Woodbee by the arm and leading him to balcony door) You will note, that although all the light seems to have flown from the earth, it has merely left it for the sky, and the reflection remains. Just as the dream lingers in the mind after the reality has faded. Dream — that's it! Put more dream into your work, man; (pushes him gently out and turns back to Felicity who is studying her own portrait) I'll shut him out. (closes balcony door) At last! — we are alone. Look at your picture, my darling. Aren't you beautiful — and as illusive as a dream, or an ideal; people who look at you with only their eyes will never see you. Unless the mind comprehends, the eyes are blind.

- FELICITY But — it is finished.
- WHISTLER (behind her) Yes. Ah, but we are just beginning, and I had to have you alone for a little — (kisses her passionately on the neck, then turns her around and tries to embrace her)
- FELICITY (holding him off) Jimmie, why does Aunt dislike you?
- WHISTLER (vaguely) Dislike me?
- FELICITY Yes, why don't you make her like you?
- WHISTLER Dislike me, like me? Darling, I'd have to be born all over again; born with the Union Jack in my mouth; my tongue dipped in hypocrisy, and my pockets stuffed with gold before she could ever like me.
- FELICITY What did you do to upset her?
- WHISTLER (restlessly) Oh, I suppose I should be more patient — I'm really quite sorry for your aunt — it must be awful for her always to have her own company. But, seriously, my sweet, what has your aunt to do with us?
- FELICITY (persisting) And then, Thomas, just now — the way you hurried him out.
- WHISTLER (burying his head on her shoulder) Felicity, I am humbled — I am jealous of you with Thomas. Tell me I am foolish.
- FELICITY Of course you are. Why do you say that?
- WHISTLER Oh, I don't know! Because fellows of his like always get the prizes, I suppose.
- FELICITY (facing him squarely) Jimmie, is it true — they say this case has ruined you, that you will be bankrupt. Tell me, were those servants really bailiffs?
- WHISTLER (taking her hands) Yes, truly bailiffs, my sweet. But don't let that worry you. They are merely the bogey men of our childhood; part of the great big bluff to make us afraid of the dark. But you see how simple they are, really; — and what good servants they make.
- FELICITY (pulling away her hands) I don't understand. One moment you can control things, the next you are pleased to put up with anything.
- WHISTLER (lightly) Why, yes, to be master of one's fate one must be a fatalist!

- FELICITY Why must you choose the hard way? Other men with only a quarter of your talent, are winning favour — weak men!
- WHISTLER Assuredly! — weak men for easy ways. But I am strong. And I will tell you a secret! — I am greedy. I could never be content to please this little lot — I must please all Time.
- FELICITY And while you are living for the future you ruin the present —
- WHISTLER (tenderly) Ah, what a woman she is — she would have posterity in her own lifetime.
- FELICITY Your reason lacks logic, for if men do not recognise the best, where is the use of giving it to them?
- WHISTLER (softly and soothingly) Because, although they don't recognise it, or even want it; they need it. An Artist learns to understand the hearts of all those, who, since the world began, have tried to serve for the love of serving. And think of it, Felicity, if artists had not dared to believe in their dreams, men would not know beauty, nor justice, nor even love. (embracing her) Ah, my blessing, but love me enough and everything will—
- FELICITY (violently) Let me go! Oh, you are vain. You mock at custom; make yourself a martyr and blame others for it. If you do not accept the world's values — how do you expect the world to give you value? You are proud where you should be humble and humble where you should be proud. You deliberately bewilder people; wrap yourself in misunderstanding.
- WHISTLER (painfully) Only as a traveller draws closer about him the folds of his cloak when the winds and the storm assail him. But you are my haven, and when you smile the cloak falls from my shoulders — I drop all disguises. In love I am naked (urgently) Felicity —
- FELICITY (wildly) It's no use. Your ways are not my ways and I don't like them.
- WHISTLER (with overwhelming emotion) My dear, my dear, I beg of you; do not speak in haste, from nerves, from stress, from anything but — conviction. (quickly and urgently). Perhaps you do not realise what you mean to me, all you mean to me. I have been too egotistical, too taken up with my great joy in you. I have allowed you to be harassed by this stupid court case. I see now I should have cherished you more — made you understand that I have no home, no country, no kindred but where you are; that to have your little hand in mine is to be fortified against all circumstances; that to feel your eyes turned from me is to be scarified by loneliness..... Ah, Felicity, my dear, my sweet, I — a wounded man — beg of you — (slowly; with sudden foreboding) unless what you said just now is true, that — you — are — not — what — I — think — you.
- FELICITY (more gently) Of course I'm not Jimmie. Everyone sees it but you. I don't understand you. I don't sympathise with you. (Whistler is dumbfounded. He turns aside, his hand pressed to his eyes. When he withdraws it, he is in front of the easel. He looks long at the picture. (Pause) (Calmly) You mustn't be hurt, Jimmie. (crosses to easel) You see, I am not what you think I am.
- WHISTLER It is as I see you. (makes an involuntary movement towards her. Then, his arms dropping to his sides, he moves wearily towards the bedroom) Perhaps it is a little too dazzling — I will get some varnish. (again presses his hand across his eyes)

- FELICITY (noticing his hand) There, you really mustn't weep, Jimmie.
- WHISTLER I'm -- just -- wiping -- the -- dust -- from -- my -- eyes.. I -- I suppose I should thank you for this revelation. It is most timely. We should always be grateful to those who show us the truth. Artists are nothing if not Truth finders. I -- (turns and goes into bedroom R.) (Pause. Woodbee appears at balcony door and seeing Felicity alone -- enters)
- WOODBEE I have entered -- may I?
- FELICITY Please do.
- WOODBEE Well, I have indulged you -- agreed to stay while your finished portrait was being completed.
- FELICITY You knew it was finished, then?
- WOODBEE Of course. But I did not mind. I wanted to make sure -- that is for you to make sure! -- that it really was finished.
- FELICITY (brightly) What do you mean?
- WOODBEE I mean that you only needed a little more homeopathic treatment -- these are some people who are a sure cure for themselves. (pause)
- FELICITY I knew at the first moment of seeing him that he was dangerous.
- WOODBEE Which made him irresistible, of course. You must give him up.
- FELICITY I did -- without his knowing it! three times.
- WOODBEE And he came back?
- FELICITY I went back.
- WOODBEE Ah!.... he must give you up.
- FELICITY (quietly) I think he will.
- WOODBEE (with suppressed eagerness) What do you mean?
- FELICITY I mean that I have hurt the only serious part of him -- his ideal.
- WOODBEE Then you are mine -- (taking her hands. Pause while they look at each other) This is inevitable... (as they kiss, Whistler appears in the doorway. They do not see him. He stands there for a moment, then withdraws and is intentionally heard outside; they break apart. Whistler enters)
- FELICITY (pointing to the portrait) You don't need me to sit any longer?
- WHISTLER (with difficulty) No; there is nothing more you can give my picture.
- WOODBEE (looking at it) By gods, you know, she really is stunning.
- FELICITY People say it is a remarkable likeness.
- WHISTLER (pridefully) No; not a likeness. The woman of this picture is more beautiful than you have ever dated. -- or

even dreamed -- to be. She has faith, vision, valour, fellowship. She dares to live; to love; to give. She is a woman to cherish; to inspire; to exalt one. She is as much above her place-seeking, marriage-bartering sex, as a star is above geese..... A likeness? This woman owes something to the shade of your eyes; to the texture of your skin and hair and the grace of your limbs. You have given her colour, form. But she has given you, and all others, a poem, a dream, an inspiration..... (the sadness creeping in) No; you can give her nothing more. You are the real and belong to the world. She is the ideal and belongs to posterity -----

- WOODBEE By gad, sir, what are you saying?
- WHISTLER (recklessly) Oh, simply freeing myself of my last friend. (looking him in the eyes) I can't afford friends (turns back)
- FELICITY (with emotion) Thomas, will you please see me to my carriage.
- WOODBEE At once. (they go out. Whistler remains standing with his back to the door. Pause. Then a knock is heard. Silence. Another knock and Dibbs enters. He is followed by the two bailiffs, wiping their lips)
- DIBBS The candles are low, sir, shall I light the lamps?
- 1ST BLF As you said, sir, the poor have the thirst! The wine was a real pleasure, but dooty comes first!
- 2ND BLF They've all gone, sir. May we remove the furnitcher nah?
- WHISTLER (nodding; still turned away) Go ahead! Help them, Dibbs. (they go ahead. As they lift the round table, it comes off the leg. The top is carried out, then the 1st bailiff returns for the leg. He stoops to pick it up, but Whistler pounces on it. As he does so, Beatrice is seen at door E.)
- BEATRICE Ah, there you are, Mr. Whistler. I have been looking for you -- in your pictures.
- 1ST BLF (holding out his hand) The leg, sir. Please give it ter me.
- WHISTLER (brandishing it) No, no. You must leave me a leg to stand on!

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

SCENE: It is early afternoon in May 1879, some months later. The scene is the same, but dismantled. In fact, nothing remains save the walls, one large picture on one of them, and a few packing cases. In the centre of the room, Whistler, Du Maurier and Beatrice Godwin are seated on boxes placed round a large packing-case which serves as a table. Remains of a hasty luncheon. Whistler wears an artist's velvet coat. The men are smoking.

It is the day of the forced sale of Whistler's goods. As the curtain rises, the raucous voice of the auctioneer can be heard raised above the critical prattle of the buyers.

- WHISTLER (looking off) Well, the hammers have won — hear them?
- BEATRICE If only I couldn't. I can't bear it!
- WHISTLER Now, if you had the robust soul of an auctioneer, that rat-atat-tat would be a melody of Orpheus in your little ears. (looking off, wistfully) They are buying my beauties!
- DU MAURIER Ah! — well, it seems the only way to make men appreciate a gift is to make them pay for it. Let's hope some of the buyers possess love as well as cash.
- WHISTLER The one thing I demand for my pictures is that none of them shall ever hang in an Academician's gallery. They refused me in my lifetime — I refuse them in death. Hear that, George, they'll never hang me after I'm dead.
- DU MAURIER They'll merely hang you until you're dead.
- BEATRICE Oh, I despise a people who can do no more for an artist than make him bankrupt.
- WHISTLER That generous heart, Beatrice — Ah, I am afraid I am but a poor painter; no man is a true artist who is not first a philosopher.
- DU MAURIER Jimmie is really quite lucky. Remember, the unwritten law for genius is: during life, the Pillory. And after death, the saint's pedestal. Just wait until you're dead Jimmie! They'll write their apologies in their cheque books.
- WHISTLER Yes, I know, they'll collect me as they collect postage stamps.... But now — oh, I don't expect them to like my work, but at least they might admit I can paint.
- DU MAURIER Now, now, where is that philosophy?
- WHISTLER (sighs) Ah, I am reconciled now. But when I was very young, I thought — in my profound ignorance I thought — that people would know I could draw just because I could make pencils and brushes fly on paper when they merely crawled for other fellows... Ha-ha, I was to find that things are not as simple as that. Why, if that was the world's technique, life would be easy for the strong instead of as it is, easy for the weak, the inept. (with a sigh) Ah, the injustice depressed me sorely. Then, at last, I realised that if the plums all went to very few who can do the thing, the generality would come in just nowhere at all; and that doesn't suit the generality.
- DU MAURIER It does not.



WHISTLER

So there is a conspiracy; an instinctive conspiracy on the part of stupidity to underrate the best and give value to rubbish. In order to do this, they set up theoretical standards whereby the artificial is natural; the useless of use; the unreal, real; the false, true; and the sublimely simple, drastic wisdom of the poets is pronounced unpractical.... And so, the stronger you are the more difficult it is for you. Well, every inventor must bludgeon through his invention; every artist must fight through his work. I intend to fight mine through. At present I am compiling my manifesto. It includes a catalogue of some of the blunders of our most respected critics.

DU M'IER

No doubt it will make posterity laugh.

WHISTLER

All critics do that.

DU M'IER

Ha! Perhaps that is the reason small critics detest fellows of your colour, Jimmie. Your kind, aided by time, always make them ridiculous.

BEATRICE

And what are you calling your manifesto?

WHISTLER

I am calling it, "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies".

DU M'IER

(laughing) You'll make them certainly.

WHISTLER

Well, fool critics who write in haste must repent at their leisure. And, if critics criticise my work, why shouldn't I criticise their criticisms? And, since by nature they are debarred from understanding my work, why should they criticise it at all? No man who cannot perceive the whole should be permitted to dissect it. One of the droll things of this pleasant life is that though the academicians are beavers for History they never learn from it that they have been wrong — always wrong — concerning the innovators. (pause. He looks off L. while the hammers and voices rise in crescendo) It seems this sale is attended mostly by my friends. They are all here — Wickham Flower, Lorde Redesdale, Howell, Oscar Wilde — looking more gorgeous than ever!.... Strange, both my best canvasses have fallen to that fellow .... that swarthy-faced fellow. I wager he's a dealer. Buying my pearls — the swine.

DU M'IER

There's one you seem to be hanging on to still (points to picture on wall)

WHISTLER

The hammers will find it — when they've finished in there.

BEATRICE

(to distract him) What will you do in Venice, Jimmie?

WHISTLER

Paint for a living — that's what I'll do.

DU M'IER

Ah, well, the Copy Books tell us that poverty is the mother of Industry.

WHISTLER

(breaking out) Fools! As though beauty was ever made because of, instead of, in spite of poverty. When will the puritans learn that the test is not poverty, but money. Give an artist an income and see what he'll do — if he does not paint, his work is well lost to the world.

BEATRICE

What a great muddle it all is.

WHISTLER

It seems the little genuine thing must be lost, doesn't it? and yet, it never is — it merely runs a larger circle! The oyster decays, the pearl remains! The artist dies, picture lives! They can wipe me off the slate; kill me with unkindness, but (pointing to picture on wall) I will

- still be there to challenge them. Ha-ha. I can still slay them with beauty as you once said, George.
- DU M'IER           When do you sail for Venice?
- WHISTLER           As soon as they've sold me up. Tomorrow, if there's a boat.
- BEATRICE           (longingly) Are you going alone?
- WHISTLER           I go everywhere alone. (looking at her intently) How quiet you are. You are the one woman I know who is intelligent without being obtrusive.
- DU M'IER           Why?
- WHISTLER           Because she is ---
- DU M'IER           I mean why do you go everywhere alone? (decisively) Jimmie, the time is ripe for you to be married. Yes, over ripe. Why, you must be ---
- WHISTLER           (hastily) No; I mustn't. You know very well, George, that an artist is as old as his brain and as young as his heart. At twenty I was older than all the academicians heaped together, and at eighty I shall be younger than those serious ones ever dare be.
- DU M'IER           What are you going to do without Beatrice in Venice?
- WHISTLER           Do you know, I was thinking of that only last night. (slowly) Beatrice, dear, I shall miss you as a bird must miss its climate.
- DU M'IER           And what will you do without him, Beatrice?
- BEATRICE           (with a little laugh) I shan't!! (they look at her) I'm going too. London in a fog makes me long for Venice in ice. Jimmie, don't say you don't want me -- I really won't intrude.
- WHISTLER           (touched) My dear, this is a great joy to me. Why, my banishment begins to feel like a homing ---
- DU M'IER           Why not make it a honeymoon? (they both look at him) You like each other ---- why don't you do something about it?
- WHISTLER           I think we can safely leave that to time.
- DU M'IER           Nonsense; time only works for us when we work. Jimmie, will you marry Beatrice?
- WHISTLER           Certainly. (with a sly glance at her) Spoken like an Englishman and a gentleman.
- DU M'IER           (not to be put off) Beatrice, will you marry Jimmie?
- BEATRICE           Certainly.
- DU M'IER           When?
- BEATRICE           Oh, someday --
- DU M'IER           Someday lacks a date. Every wedding has a date.
- BEATRICE           Then you must choose it.
- DU M'IER           I?
- BEATRICE           And the place.
- WHISTLER           And the presiding official:

- BEATRICE           And give me away.
- DU MAURIER        With a pound of prunes? (They all laugh. Du Maurier takes a card from his waistcoat and writes on it. Whistler and Beatrice smile at each other almost shyly)
- WHISTLER          I don't marry, though I tolerate those who do. Now it seems my toleration must include even myself.
- BEATRICE          It is plain that I have reached the age of indiscretion.
- DU MAURIER        (jumping up and presenting the card to Whistler) The date is — tomorrow. Here's the place and the et ceteras. I'm off.
- BEATRICE          (jumping up) Not without me.
- WHISTLER          But ———
- BEATRICE          (hurriedly) You forget I have to buy my trousseau ... Oh, I believe it is customary for an engaged couple to kiss each other farewell.
- WHISTLER          What a pyramidal piece of impertinence. (she kisses him lightly on the cheek) That was a rehearsal. (he catches her close) All good actors follow up a rehearsal with a brilliant performance. (kisses her) And an encore! (kisses her again) And another ——— (she breaks away, laughing, and runs to the door)
- BEATRICE          ———— an exit! (curtains and vanishes)
- DU MAURIER        (at door) Au revoir, Jimmie!
- WHISTLER          (greatly excited) George, George, whatever gave you the idea of —
- DU MAURIER        (pointedly) There are some people who never know what they want... until they get it. (exits/ Whistler, left alone, smiles after them; then unearths a picture from behind a box and gazes at it long and steadily. Suddenly Barthe appears at the door and Whistler hastily conceals picture. Barthe gives a series of yells and pounces)
- WHISTLER          (struggling) Now, now, don't expose your nationality by making so unseemly a noise at a public function.
- BARTHE            B-b-b-but think; be reasonable.
- WHISTLER          (freeing himself) Why should I?
- BARTHE            But remember the first time we meet, *mistaire Vistlaire* —
- WHISTLER          I am sorry, but I remember only pleasant things.
- BARTHE            H'mmm! You come to my shop and you buy many beautiful things from me, *mistaire Vistlaire*, and I think you are so gentleman. Zen you go and I hear you are so artiste. A-a-a-ah! zen always I ask, "but will he pay, *siz artiste?*" Your friends know you too well to admit it. At last I take cab to your house in *Lindsay Row* and vat do I find?
- WHISTLER          The house, I presume.
- BARTHE            Ze house, yes. And upstairs, you before a little pictaire, painting, painting, painting; and behind you, your doll pupils, so brussers Coppie, all holding candle And *mistaire Vistlaire*, vot do you say?
- WHISTLER          (shaking his head) Sorry, my memory, you know.

- BARTHE Zen I will tell you. You say to me, you say, "You, Barthe, se very man I want -- hold candle". And I -- vot do I do, mistaire Vistlaire?
- WHISTLER (shaking his head as before) A pest on this leaking memory!
- BARTHE Zen I will tell you. I hold se candle. And you? You paint and you paint, and zen you take pictaire and you go downstairs and you get in se cab, (with a sob) my cab and you drive away, and ve hold candle long and long, and I see you no more. Mon Dieu il est terrible, ce Vistlaire, I see you no more.
- WHISTLER Ah, but you are seeing me now, Barthe. This is your revenge. And wait, this should be your pride; for see! (points to wall) This is the picture you held the candle for. See, Barthe, a triumph over nature! A light to posterity! That is your spiritual reward and, now, here is your material one. (hands him a note)
- BARTHE (taking it reluctantly) But, mistaire Vistlaire, you are being sold.
- WHISTLER Ha-ha, yes! I sold you, and now you sell me -- that is justice, isn't it, Barthe? As for that little paper -- I have not enough of them to inspire me to be frugal. Besides it was spoiling the fit of my jacket. That's the great point, Barthe! In this world, in the commerce between man and man, it matters not whether one sells one's fellow men or is sold by them, but the fit of a jacket -- ah, that is everything!
- BARTHE (pocketing note) So! if you wish it --
- WHISTLER I do. And now that I see your plain face -- eh, I mean your face plainly, I begin to recollect that I sent you a picture for payment the very next day -- that is if my memory is not playing her usual tricks.
- BARTHE A pictaire, ; yes a pictaire. A-a-a-h! it vos se terrible insult.
- WHISTLER Hm! I believe you even hinted as much to my messenger. If I remember correctly your hint ~~to~~ took the form of throwing my picture out of the window. You should have been a professional critic, Barthe.
- BARTHE But a pictaire, a little pictaire of a man -- not even life size.
- WHISTLER But then you know, few men are life-size. er -- now that we are reconciled, Barthe, I want you to do something for me --
- BARTHE (backing) A-ah, not hold candle ---
- WHISTLER No; no; no; I merely want you to inform me who that swarthy looking dealer is. See, there, (pointing off) the one who bought my two best canvasses.
- BARTHE Ah, him, he buys two of those for a lady -- he has se instruction ---
- WHISTLER Who is she?
- BARTHE Zat I do not know. I do not see her even. (the auctioneer, followed by the buyers, now enter and stand before the solitary picture on the wall. Among them is Woodbee, the precious young man, the dealer and Wilde. Wilde carries a sketch; he approaches Whistler. During the following the solemn business of bidding is begun in pantomime)

- WILDE See, what I scored!
- WHISTLER (giving it a glance) Oh, yes, that crayon sketch of a woman.
- WILDE A woman! -- what a man! It is catalogued as a portrait of Sarah Bernhardt. You painted Sarah, didn't you?
- WHISTLER She is an actress -- I left that to her.
- WILDE Ah, then I must get her to verify it by autographing it. She will assuredly see the likeness if I praise it elegantly enough. (a buyer approaches holding out a picture)
- BUYER See, here, sir, I have once again purchased this abominable portrait of myself.
- WHISTLER Oh, I really cannot allow you to term yourself abominable.
- BUYER Don't misconstrue me, sir. I say your portrait of me is abominable. (brandishing it before him. This time, Whistler does not deign to reply)
- WILDE I do not agree. Jimmie is one of the greatest masters of painting, in my opinion. And, I may add, that in this opinion Jimmie himself entirely concurs.
- BUYER Do you call that a good piece of art?
- WILDE Well, do you call yourself a good piece of nature?
- BUYER Conceit, confounded conceit! (stamps out)
- PRECIOUS YOUNG MAN Oh, Mr. Woodbee, I must congratulate you on being hung in the Academy. (Woodbee turns graciously to the speaker. Whistler looks at Wilde with raised eyebrows)
- WILDE (nodding) Yes, our Thomas has been elected to our most Royal Academy.
- WHISTLER Well, well, well, the conferring of prizes, like the conferring of titles, has no false question of merit about it. (Woodbee passes them pompously)
- WILDE Fame has made Thomas quite frisky.
- WHISTLER (laughing) I can imagine his jubilation. He would much rather be a renowned nobody than an unknown somebody.
- WILDE (laughing) Bravo! They may clip your wings, Jimmie, but you still retain your sting.
- WHISTLER (intent on sale) S-s-s-h! Listen -- (the auctioneer is suddenly heard)
- AUCTIONEER Going --- going --- going --- GONE!
- WHISTLER (exclaiming) The dealer's got it! (babble of buyers. Wilde joins them as they begin to struggle from the room. Some of them bow to Whistler who is trying to intercept the dealer when the precious young man nounces upon him)
- P.Y.M. (gushing) Oh, Mr. Whistler, Mr. Whistler, what do you think? Mother wants me to take up painting, and we thought it would be nice if I studied under you -- because of Father being born at Lowell, where you were born, very much at the same time, too.
- WHISTLER Very charming! And so your father is a young man and was born at Lowell, Massachusetts. Very interesting, no doubt, and as you please. But I shall be born when and

- where I want, and as to age, I object to having any.
- P.Y.M. (laughing inanely) Aha, aha! -- I thought I would just like to say dood-day to you.
- WHISTLER (fixing his eyeglass) H'm! Well now you have said it, Good-day!
- P.Y.M. But, Mr. Whistler, about my painting?
- WHISTLER Where have you studied?
- P.Y.M. I have never studied anywhere.
- WHISTLER You couldn't have done better .
- P.Y.M. Oh, but I feel things -- you understand?
- WHISTLER Perfectly .... H'm! You have been through college?
- P.Y.M. Oh, yes, right through.
- WHISTLER I suppose you shoot.
- P.Y.M. A little.
- WHISTLER Fish, of course?
- P.Y.M. Oh, of course'.
- WHISTLER Go in for tennis too; no doubt? ... Yes? ... Well, then, I can let you off the painting. (he turns away. The precious young man stands quite bewildered, till the last of the crowd sweeps him out L.)
- Alone. Whistler takes the picture out of its hiding place and is looking at it when Beatrice bursts in, breathlessly, and throws a small parcel down on the packing-case table)
- BEATRICE There! I've bought my trousseau.
- WHISTLER (opening parcel) A toothbrush and a sponge. Extravagancies
- BEATRICE One doesn't get married every day. Jimmie, what is that picture you were looking at when I came in? -- you wore such a serious expression.
- WHISTLER (carelessly) Oh that!
- BEATRICE This? Why ... It is beautiful!
- WHISTLER That! (shakes himself. Goes slowly and takes picture from her and brings it down centre. It is his portrait of Felicity. He holds it at arms length and speaks steadily) This? .... this is a picture I call Demos.
- BEATRICE Demos? -- the mob? (following and looking over his shoulder) But it has F - e - l - ----- "Felicity" written on it.
- WHISTLER That was my first title. I now call it Demos ... the crowd. See, a pretty woman! The mob's a pretty woman; yes, it is -- a pretty woman, who, when the artist woos her with his gifts; turns from him in disdain to smile upon her own kind.... Cry to her; cast your very soul before her; fast and anguish; marshal your powers to regale her with feats worthy of high favour -- and she will not even notice you. It is her privilege to inspire lovelier emotions than she is ever able to return -- for she is not accessible to love but only to flattery -- however gross ... so it becomes unworthy to woo her as it is futile to win her.

- BEATRICE (softly) But, in the end, she is like Fame and must follow those she is unworthy to lead.
- WHISTLER Follows them — yes; to put flowers on their grave. (He replaces the picture and shakes off his dark mood, takes her hand) Beatrice, that swarthy-faced dealer bought my three best canvasses. I asked Barthe who it was commissioned the dealer —
- BEATRICE You know then? .... I wanted it for a happy surprise, after all — (indicating the empty room) all this.
- WHISTLER (overwhelmed) What? The dealer was buying my pictures for you?
- BEATRICE For you, Jimmie. They were very expensive — they took all the money I had.
- WHISTLER Beatrice, you did that? Oh, may life reward you, my dear.
- BEATRICE If I have your love, Jimmie, then I have a greater reward than any woman deserves.
- WHISTLER (kissing her) Such kindness is better than wisdom. Do you know you are that rarest thing on the planet—a chivalrous
- BEATRICE My dear — how you must have suffered to be grateful <sup>woman</sup> for so little. But you have someone to protect you now; and I must save you from the god in yourself as well as from the beast in man. (change of mood)
- BEATRICE Jimmie, tell me, when was it you first fell in love with me?
- WHISTLER (trinkling) I didn't fall. I rose.— to the bait. Wait! I have a sudden and thrilling premonition. It is that we — you and I — are going to be very happy; wildly gloriously happy!
- BEATRICE Oh, Jimmie, it is my prayer. That and one other —
- WHISTLER And that other?
- BEATRICE Your career. Jimmie, your work must go on —
- WHISTLER Don't burden your brave heart. So long as I can do my work in my own way — my career will take care of itself. And I'll tell you a secret — come close while I breath it! An artist's career always begins tomorrow! And see, Beatrice, my sweet, (his arm around her he points to the bare room) See, we have a nice clean start!

C U R T A I N

THE END.