

Three times, the young artist counted. No less than three insults tossed out like withered flower petals onto the floor of the lecture hall. Not once, not twice, but thrice.

It could not be ignored.

The young artist rose from his chair at the end of the row, and as quietly as he might, he walked down to the podium. Oblivious to his approach, the speaker readied himself to project the fourth insult. It travelled no farther than his lips. The young artist's fist flashed with **magnetic** accuracy, connecting with the guest speaker's chin. The thin man possessed impeccable academic credentials, be he also had as the pugilists say, a glass chin. He dropped to the floor, stunned. The young painter stepped back; honour satisfied.

Struck dumb by such uncouth behaviour, the audience formed a tableau that Alma-Tadema might himself have painted.

The Director turned upon the pugilist.

"Master Simkins, we neither expect or condone **uncouth** behaviour in the **Ambrose School of Art**, and especially not upon the esteemed person of a generous supporter of this School. You will apologise. And help him to his feet. If you do not you may be expelled, I warn you."

Simkins made no move.

"When he apologises, then I shall help. Not before." He stood his ground before the baleful stare of the Director. "I do not regard his quotation of Mr Whistler's description of Mr Alma Tadema's sublime art as "Five-o'clock-tea Antiquity" to be appropriate, nor do I appreciate the words "banal" and "frivolous" to be uttered in relation to the great man."

From the floor, where blood dripped onto his **flowery** waistcoat, becoming hidden almost immediately amongst the florid blooms, came the riposte,

"My **suspicion** is that you are not as widely read as I young man. Alma-Tadema has produced good work representing figures of Greek history and domestic subjects involving drinking and eating, painters or poets, and festive occasions. Technical mastery, not true genius."

The young painter absorbed this, his temperature rising with every word. A crossroads awaited him. Truth or ... what?

He extended his left hand to the prone figure, a gesture which was accepted, and the young artist pulled his pallid victim gently from the floor.

The speaker had barely attained the upright position when the young artist's fist flashed again, sending the older man not only to the floor, but towards insensibility to boot. The Director was a stony figure.

The young painter helpfully filled the void.

"Sir, the Ambrose School of Art asks of us to be individual, to be men of honour, to love art, and in all things be honest and truthful to ourselves. Is it honourable for our guest to attack a painter of such renown and expect us to stay silent? I say not."

The young painter turned to leave, winking to his friend in the front row. He did not turn again as he called out,

"Do what you will sir. My conscience is clear. I am content."

