

# Mildly Despoiling the Future

*by*

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*Newhall Square  
Birmingham*

MMX

*This episode is acted out entirely within the confines of Newhall Square in the City of Birmingham.*

## **Scene 1** **An Interrupted Introduction**

*At the main entrance to the Square.*

[Woodcock] Good evening and welcome ladies and gentleman. My name is Edward Woodcock and I am the Acting Assistant Head of Heritage Experience here at Newhall Square. Shortly we will start our tour of this hallowed site but first a little housekeeping: [please be aware that you will be traversing through a redevelopment site hence my sensible clothing and footwear. Furthermore, the management insist that noise levels are kept to a minimum; flash photography is not permitted as this may damage the fabric of this once great edifice and imbibing of alcohol is strictly forbidden. Fire exits are located there and there. One final note: please may I take this opportunity to apologise for the furore here tonight and any inconvenience this may cause – nobody saw fit to inform me that there is some sort of party in the main workshop tonight - I'm sure it breaches all sorts of Health and Safety rules.

*Woodcock is interrupted by Despoiler and Terry.*

[Despoiler] Did you say party? [*Terry starts barking*]

[Woodcock] Ssh! Please.

[Despoiler] You've got Terry all excited with the promise of a rumpus. Here, go get your ball Terry. [*Throws ball*].

[Woodcock] Stop! Do you know you are contravening countless laws? Stop!

*Despoiler and Terry run towards Square*

[Woodcock] I do apologise ladies and gentlemen. Disenfranchised youth. On with the tour. Follow me up my passage. You can almost hear the fall of hoof and clinking of bottles as we move into the site. Here to our left is the main workshop area. We'll just turn this corner to get a better view.

*Woodcock is stopped in his tracks by Despoiler brazenly whistling a tune.*

[Woodcock] Not you again. I'm calling security. What's your name lad?

*Woodcock prods Despoiler with his cane.*



## Scene 2 My Name's Frank Bashful

*On the corner of the Main Workshop by the pencilled '600'.*

[Despoiler] My name's Frank Bashful. I am frank, but I am in no means bashful. Ask any of the boys when we go for a sup of an evening after working here at Elkingtons. I could tell you stories that'd make Satan blush. You only have to take a trip down the canal and you'll be assailed by them purple haired catastrophes that pass themselves off as ladies! I tell you!

[Woodcock] Hmmm, I have to agree. I will get security to add it to the list of prohibited activities. Now clear off sonny.

*Despoiler talks over Woodcock's comments.*

[Despoiler] Here we all are, 400 of us, working our way up, man and boy. I've heard folk call this a fairy palace; myself I liken it to a Cyclopean forge with us moulding thunderbolts for Zeus. You think I'm being a bit daft right?! I'm telling you I've had many a friend lose an eye, but Elkington, bless him he keeps them on. I myself had a nasty accident after working on a nautilus shell design. So caught up was I with the intricacies of the pattern, I mean it was an obsession, I left my workstation to shed a tear for Nelson. Upon finishing my duty I was somewhat hasty with the zipper – I still blame it on my eagerness to be back with my hands gently sculpting the pink wax...instead my hands were gently holding my ruined member.

[Woodcock] There are ladies present. Security!

[Despoiler] 'We find you six days work, and you are to find six days labour,' so goes the saying of the gaffer. I was crestfallen. For a week I lay in my bed, my brain boiling with possibilities of gilded centaurs and fawns, strapping Cyclopes bearing Achilles' shield, all the while the shillings haemorrhaged from my pocket as I missed day after day of work.

[Woodcock] Serves you right you ne'er-do-well. Security!

[Despoiler] What was to be done? The following Monday I went back to the factory, and boldly knocked at the gaffer's door. To prove my worth I polished 600 pen nibs in just under an hour, (and arranged a session with Madame Buddleia for him) for which I received this honorary chain. Additionally, he erected this memorial here. [*Points to 600*].

[Woodcock] Did you write that you vandal? I'll get the Foreman onto you.

[Despoiler, defiant] Ruined member or no, I have made my mark on history. A plague o' redstarts upon ye!

*Despoiler runs back round corner to sign.*



### Scene 3 Electroplating Solution

*At the end of the Main Workshop by the patch of verdigris.*

[Woodcock] Thank goodness for that. Now, on with the tour. Here 200 years ago you would have been at the very heart of the fairy palace. Smell the chemical vapours, see the flurry of activity, taste the metal in the air around you and hear the hymn of contented labour. I would like to play for you a short recording of the Elkington Male Voice Choir singing 'Abide with Me'.

*Woodcock presses the play button.*

[Recording] I have lead a long and interesting life in my magic trough. Transforming knives, forks, pins, buttons, trophies, trays, tureens, sauce boats, coffee cups, pen nibs, corkscrews, naval equipment, crucifixes, clips, belt buckles, toast racks, and in one tragic instance the forefinger of a certain foreman called Alan.

[Woodcock] This isn't right. What's this?

[Recording] I, with my neighbouring baths of electroplating solution, did wonders for the Elkingtons, transforming household objects into dazzling gilded masterpieces. Our clientele were the crème de la crème. : The Marquis of Hertford, Gustave de Rothschild, Prince Louis of Hesse, Alessandro Castellani, Charles Dickens and the Maharaja of Jahore. We were the talk of the town.

[Woodcock] I'm sorry ladies and gentlemen. My assistant must have taped over the recording.

*Woodcock continues to tut at the filthy innuendo through the next section.*

[Recording] Under the delicate hands of Alexander Parkes – oh he had such good hands, they fluttered about like doves – I aided in the creation of perhaps our greatest coup – gilding a rosebud with a cobweb of gossamer tenderly snagged in the petals. A gilded cobweb! A miracle of form! I remember it as if it were yesterday, the excitement, the panic as Prince Albert himself was paying us a visit. We had to be on our best behaviour, let me tell you some of these younger solutions they bring in are all ferment and mischief. Too many ions, they throw their metal salts about like a blinded Samson. Not I.

Now, I know the end is near.

[Woodcock] It is for you. Now how do you stop this thing?

*Woodcock jabs hopelessly at the player.*

[Recording] There was a leak in the plating bath recently and I lost a lot of potassium cyanide. Alexander doesn't fondle my atoms the way he used to and I feel obsolete. But let it never be forgotten that it was in my magic bath, in the swirl and torment of my most passionate electrodispositions that manifold silver dreams were wrought.

*Woodcock composes himself and apologises again.*

[Woodcock] Right, now, where were we? On with the tour.

## Scene 4 Madame Buddleia

*The corner of the Square by the buddleia bush.*

[Tart, appears from round corner] Hello gorgeous. Weren't you here last night Mr WoodCOCK? Or should I say Woody?

[Woodcock] I'm here every night. As an officially designated Heritage Experience Facilitator I have legitimate business here unlike you. You trollop.

*Woodcock is slightly flustered and makes embarrassed and offended comments all through Tart's speech.*

[Tart] It's not easy being a tart with a heart. I have so many girls to look after I get dizzy. We're a hardy bunch make no mistake – I've toured with my ladies through quarries, railways, gravel workings and building sites; but it's like so many things, without the proper organisation it all goes to pot.

[Woodcock] I knew it! Drugs! They're all on drugs. Disgusting!

[Tart] I seen some of my ladies flaunting their wares atop the church rooftop to 'better the trade'. As punishment they went without their checkups from Dr Tortoiseshell and Mr Peacock for a whole month. You see our clients prefer their girls like their gardens – WITHOUT TOO MUCH WILDLIFE IN THE UNDERGROWTH.

[Woodcock] Tut! You despoil these hallowed bricks with your filth.

[Tart] That's not the only thing I'm contesting with, seed distribution is rife. 'Any minute crack or softening of the mortar will let a seed in!' cried my mother, bless her soul. I can't have the ladies getting pregnant on the job, who's to look after all these babbas? 'Honnaaay, I'll have to let you go,' too many times this year I've had to let go. You'll see them, I guarantee, my lost ladies, spread all over this city.

[Woodcock] Amoral. Security!

*Woodcock becomes more and more agitated and awkward.*

[Tart] Our lifespan is short, most of us don't see past 37. It's a hard life; I myself have survived countless competition from neighbouring tarts from Wolverhampton and Coventry. They've all got their eyes on the prize. I've fought root stem and seedhead with the best of them.

[Woodcock] You offend me. Security will be here any moment. Don't run away!

*Tart runs towards smaller buddleias in centre of Square Woodcock wags his cane at the runaway Tart.*



[Tart] You won't see me disappearing for Winter let me tell you! I'll still be out rounding up the girls and bringing in the clients, take these two for instance – Crystal & Chantalle. Two new girls into the fold. Hey! They may look small to you now but they're ushering in a new age of glory for the family of Buddleia. Put your best leaves forward girls! Sway your slender stems! A tart's work is never done!

*Tart runs off towards the gate through to the Whitmore Warehouse. Woodcock stops. Panting he continues to wag his cane.*

[Woodcock] Get off this property you harridan!

*Woodcock composes himself and takes the group to the paved section and Scene 5.*



## Scene 5 Lady Whitmore's Canal Arm

*The paved section adjacent to the Whitmore Warehouse.*

[Woodcock, throughout speech he is interrupted by screams: 'Tart, whores, harridan, stygian foes etc] Look if you will at this fine example of industrial vernacular. The fenestration. The pitch of the roof. The exquisite bond work. It is all testament to...

*Woodcock is interrupted by Aqueous Medium.*

[Aqueous Medium] Get awf my land you tarts,  
You brazen hussies invading gas lit streets  
Invading Birmingham from foreign parts  
Tempting labourers with leather skins  
And the boys from Newhall pricked by pins.  
(That's not the only thing that's getting pricked tonight!)

[Woodcock] What on earth are you doing you mad man?

[Aqueous Medium] I am the aqueous medium for Lady Whitmore, the canal arm talks to me through this glass of water.

[Aqueous Medium] Madame Buddleia, with her throng of girls,  
Saints above us! Stalk elsewhere!  
My private basin, soft as pearls  
Now echoes tartily with knobble knees  
And boozy floozies with legs like trees.

[Aqueous Medium] Aaaghh! The waters teem with wrath!

*Aqueous Medium throws the water over Woodcock and runs off to Whitmore Warehouse . Woodcock splutters confusedly through the next verse and his delivery morphs into that of a Brian Blessed-style actor.*

[Woodcock spluttering] What have you done?

[Woodcock] Madame Buddleia, her hair all purple and blue  
Static as meringue,  
A corset of whalebone of dubious hue,  
Her splendid modern form,  
Invades brick and mortar to keep herself warm.



[Woodcock] Where once I carried sand and brass  
Now Crystal the pistol doth douse her fat arse,  
Or dips her ogress foot in my hair  
Whilst Parson McMullen fondles  
DOWN THERE.

*Woodcock delivers the final two verses with much passion and flouncing*

[Woodcock] Heed my warning from here  
To King Norton's stop lock  
The path to ruin is assured if  
You think with your cock-adoodledo!

For the whores of Babylon, a new day begins  
Birmingham is awash with their kisses  
And sins!

*Woodcock collapses exhausted mopping his brow.*





## Scene 6 Bellamy Redstart

*In the Square looking towards the Whitmore Warehouse.*

*Bellamy emerges from behind gate, bearing placard.*

[Bellamy] Come together people! As we draw to the end of this frankly ridiculous foray into the history of Newhall Square and its surrounding constituents, may I draw your attention to a matter of colossal importance. Do you know this area is a fertile breeding ground for that most wonderful, nay I may say terrible of birds - the Black Redstart?

*Bellamy hands placard to Woodcock as he stands falteringly up. The placard provides Woodcock with renewed vigour. Woodcock waves the placard throughout.*

[Bellamy] I say terrible because I have noticed of late a shift in temperament that edges towards the apocalyptic. But they're so small you cry! These little fellows can hold up whole project developments because they're a protected species.

Raise your eyes to yonder window.

*Woodcock points with his cane/torch at Redstart on windowsill of Whitmore Warehouse and hands binoculars to a member of the tour. Bellamy becomes emotional towards the end of the next paragraph.*

[Bellamy] See him up there? That's Simon. He's been watching this whole charade all night long. One of 500 wintering birds, also the head of an elite wing of Redstarts known as the Solid Bastards. Whereas most of his family will eat insects, worms, berries and seeds, Simon will drink gin, smoke opium and hit small children. What caused such a mild mannered and rare breed of bird to become so aggressive?

*Bellamy composes himself and delivers the next line in a sinister manner.*

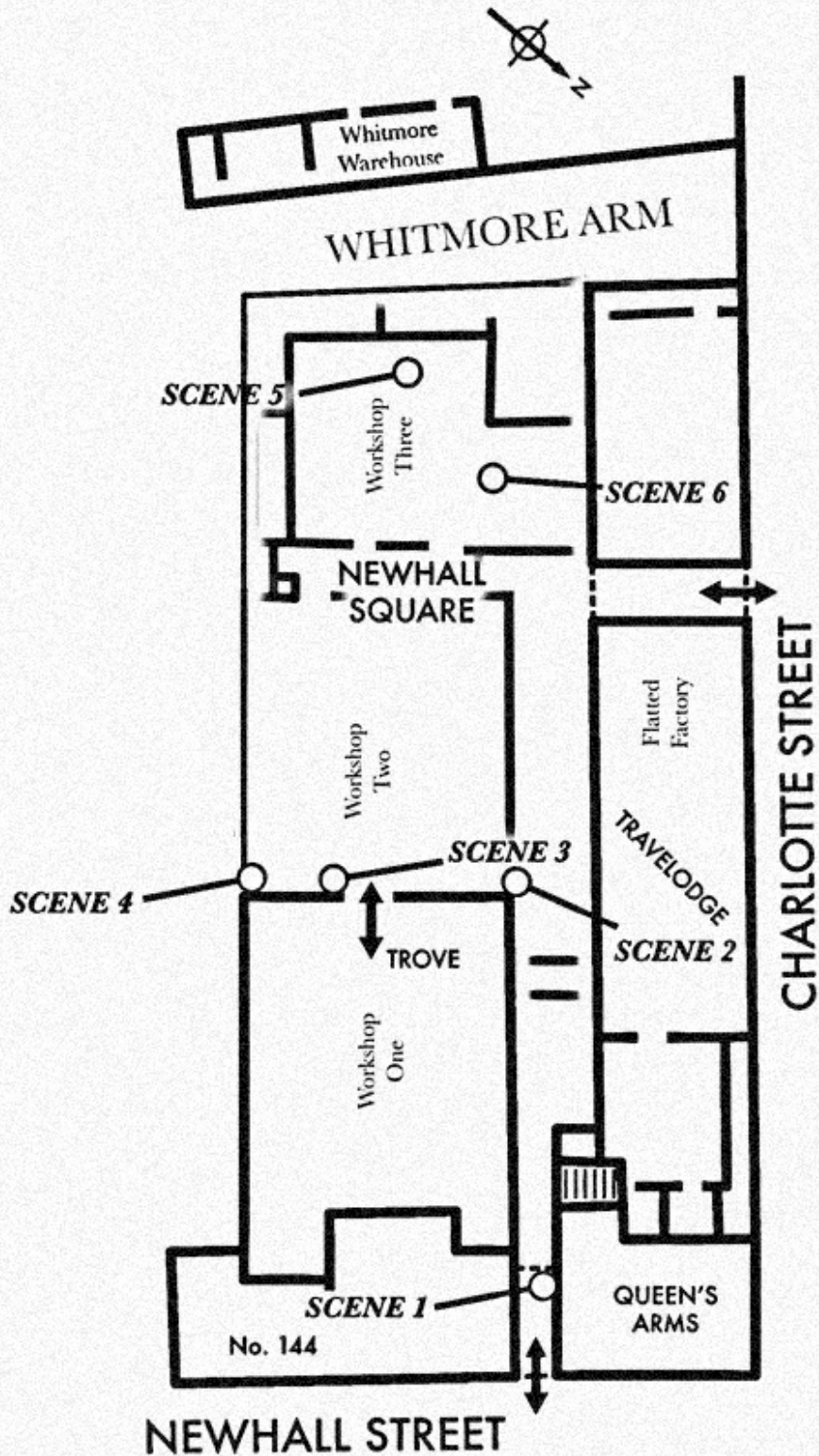
[Bellamy] It's devastatingly simple.

*Bellamy and Woodcock become increasingly agitated.*

Simon's family is one of the most ancient branches of Old World Flycatchers and this is their home. Unrest boiled as they recently heard that a giant McDonalds was on the cards. Fiercely opposed to rivers of greasy burgers and molten apple fritters they formed an elite. You may still find the bones of an intrepid property developer littered around the square. Hark ye! Simon is looking mighty pissy. Time we scarpered! For those of you brave or stupid enough to hang around, God be with you!

*Woodcock and Bellamy exeunt/scarper stage left.*





- SCENE 1* At the main entrance to the Square  
*SCENE 2* On the corner of the Main Workshop by the pencilled '600'  
*SCENE 3* At the end of the Main Workshop by the patch of Verdi Gris  
*SCENE 4* The corner of the Square by the buddleia bush  
*SCENE 5* The paved section adjacent to the Whitmore Warehouse  
*SCENE 6* In the Square looking towards the Whitmore Warehouse