

BRICE-CHATER-SEPTIMUS

have amazing news to tell you. Someone has taken to writing wild and whirling letters in your name. I received one not half an hour ago.

BRICE (*Angrily*) Mr Hodge! Look to your honour, sir! If you cannot attend to me without this foolery, nominate your second who might settle the business as between gentlemen. No doubt your friend Byron would do you the service.

Septimus gives up the game.

SEPTIMUS Oh yes, he would do me the service. (*His mood changes, he turns to Chater.*) Sir—I repent your injury. You are an honest fellow with no more malice in you than poetry.

CHATER (*Happily*) Ah well!—that is more like the thing! (*Overtaken by doubt.*) Is he apologizing?

BRICE There is still the injury to his conjugal property, Mrs Chater's—

CHATER Tush, sir!

BRICE As you will—her tush. Nevertheless—

But they are interrupted by Lady Croom, also entering from the garden.

LADY CROOM Oh—excellently found! Mr Chater, this will please you very much. Lord Byron begs a copy of your new book. He dies to read it and intends to include your name in the second edition of his *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*.

CHATER *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, your ladyship, is a doggerel aimed at Lord Byron's seniors and betters. If he intends to include me, he intends to insult me.

LADY CROOM Well, of course he does, Mr Chater. Would you rather be thought not worth insulting? You should be proud to be in the company of Rogers and Moore and Wordsworth—ah! 'The Couch of Eros'! (*For she has spotted Septimus's copy of the book on the table.*)

SEPTIMUS That is my copy, madam.

~~**SEPTIMUS** (*As though it were too easy to make the effort worthwhile*)
'...and made the water which they beat to follow faster, as amorous of their strokes. For her own person, it beggared all description—she did lie in her pavilion.'~~

~~*Thomasina, in tears of rage, is running out through the garden.*~~

~~**THOMASINA** I hope you die!~~

~~*She nearly bumps into Brice who is entering. She runs out of sight. Brice enters.*~~

BRICE Good God, man, what have you told her?

SEPTIMUS Told her? Told her what?

BRICE Hodge!

Septimus looks outside the door, slightly contrite about Thomasina, and sees that Chater is skulking out of view.

SEPTIMUS Chater! My dear fellow! Don't hang back—come in, sir!

Chater allows himself to be drawn sheepishly into the room, where Brice stands on his dignity.

CHATER Captain Brice does me the honour—I mean to say, sir, whatever you have to say to me, sir, address yourself to Captain Brice.

SEPTIMUS How unusual. (*To Brice*) Your wife did not appear yesterday, sir. I trust she is not sick?

BRICE My wife? I have no wife. What the devil do you mean, sir?

Septimus makes to reply, but hesitates, puzzled. He turns back to Chater.

SEPTIMUS I do not understand the scheme, Chater. Whom do I address when I want to speak to Captain Brice?

BRICE Oh, slippery, Hodge—slippery!

SEPTIMUS (*To Chater*) By the way, Chater—(*he interrupts himself and turns back to Brice, and continues as before*) by the way, Chater, I