

THOMASINA

SEPTIMUS Did he?

THOMASINA He said you were a witty fellow, and he had almost by heart an article you wrote about—well, I forget what, but it concerned a book called 'The Maid of Turkey' and how you would not give it to your dog for dinner.

SEPTIMUS Ah. Mr Chater was at breakfast, of course.

THOMASINA He was, not like certain lazybones.

SEPTIMUS He does not have Latin to set and mathematics to correct.

He takes Thomasina's lesson book from underneath Plautus and tosses it down the table to her.

THOMASINA Correct? What was incorrect in it? *(She looks into the book.)* Alpha minus? Pooh! What is the minus for?

SEPTIMUS For doing more than was asked.

THOMASINA You did not like my discovery?

SEPTIMUS A fancy is not a discovery.

THOMASINA A girl is not a rebuttal.

Septimus finishes what he is writing. He folds the pages into a letter. He has sealing wax and the means to melt it. He seals the letter and writes on the cover: Mamma!

→ You are churlish with me because Mama is paying attention to your friend. Well, let them elope, they cannot turn back the advancement of knowledge. I think it is an excellent discovery. Each week I plot your equations dot for dot, x s against y s in all manner of algebraical relation, and every week they draw themselves as commonplace geometry, as if the world of forms were nothing but arcs and angles. God's truth, Septimus, if there is an equation for a curve like a bell, there must be an equation for one like a bluebell, and if a bluebell, why not a rose? Do we believe nature is written in numbers?

SEPTIMUS We do.

THOMASINA Then why do your equations only describe the shapes of manufacture?

SEPTIMUS I do not know.

THOMASINA Armed thus, God could only make a cabinet.

SEPTIMUS He has mastery of equations which lead into infinities where we cannot follow.

THOMASINA What a faint-heart! We must work outward from the middle of the maze. We will start with something simple. *(She picks up the apple leaf.)* I will plot this leaf and deduce its equation. You will be famous for being my tutor when Lord Byron is dead and forgotten.

Septimus completes the business with his letter. He puts the letter in his pocket.

SEPTIMUS *(Firmly)* Back to Cleopatra.

THOMASINA ~~Is it Cleopatra?~~—I hate Cleopatra!

~~SEPTIMUS You hate her? Why?~~

→ THOMASINA Everything is turned to love with her. New love, absent love, lost love—I never knew a heroine that makes such noodles of our sex. It only needs a Roman general to drop anchor outside the window and away goes the empire like a christening mug into a pawn shop. If Queen Elizabeth had been a Ptolemy history would have been quite different—we would be admiring the pyramids of Rome and the great Sphinx of Verona.

SEPTIMUS God save us.

THOMASINA But instead, the Egyptian noodle made carnal embrace with the enemy who burned the great library of Alexandria without so much as a fine for all that is overdue. Oh, Septimus!—can you bear it? All the lost plays of the Athenians! Two hundred at least by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides—thousands of poems—Aristotle's