



CHATER I think you know it, sir. You have insulted my wife.

SEPTIMUS Insulted her? That would deny my nature, my conduct, and the admiration in which I hold Mrs Chater.

CHATER I have heard of your admiration, sir! You insulted my wife in the gazebo yesterday evening!

SEPTIMUS You are mistaken. I made love to your wife in the gazebo. She asked me to meet her there, I have her note somewhere, I dare say I could find it for you, and if someone is putting it about that I did not turn up, by God, sir, it is a slander.

CHATER You damned lecher! You would drag down a lady's reputation to make a refuge for your cowardice. It will not do! I am calling you out!

SEPTIMUS Chater! Chater, Chater, Chater! My dear friend!

CHATER You dare to call me that. I demand satisfaction!

SEPTIMUS Mrs Chater demanded satisfaction and now you are demanding satisfaction. I cannot spend my time day and night satisfying the demands of the Chater family. As for your wife's reputation, it stands where it ever stood.

CHATER You blackguard!

SEPTIMUS I assure you. Mrs Chater is charming and spirited, with a pleasing voice and a dainty step, she is the epitome of all the qualities society applauds in her sex—and yet her chief renown is for a readiness that keeps her in a state of tropical humidity as would grow orchids in her drawers in January.

CHATER Damn you, Hodge, I will not listen to this! Will you fight or not?

SEPTIMUS (*Definitively*) Not! There are no more than two or three poets of the first rank now living, and I will not shoot one of them dead over a perpendicular poke in a gazebo with a woman whose reputation could not be adequately defended with a platoon of musketry deployed by rota.

CHATER-SEPTIMUS

CHATER Ha! You say so! Who are the others? In your opinion?—no—no—!—this goes very ill, Hodge. I will not be flattered out of my course. You say so, do you?

SEPTIMUS I do. And I would say the same to Milton were he not already dead. Not the part about his wife, of course—

CHATER But among the living? Mr Southey?

SEPTIMUS Southey I would have shot on sight.

CHATER (*Shaking his head sadly*) Yes, he has fallen off. I admired 'Thalaba' quite, but 'Madoc' (*he chuckles*), oh dear me!—but we are straying from the business here—you took advantage of Mrs Chater, and if that were not bad enough, it appears every stableboy and scullery maid on the strength—

SEPTIMUS Damn me! Have you not listened to a word I said?

CHATER I have heard you, sir, and I will not deny I welcome your regard, God knows one is little appreciated if one stands outside the coterie of hacks and placemen who surround Jeffrey and the Edinburgh—

SEPTIMUS My dear Chater, they judge a poet by the seating plan of Lord Holland's table!

CHATER By heaven, you are right! And I would very much like to know the name of the scoundrel who slandered my verse drama 'The Maid of Turkey' in the *Piccadilly Recreation*, too!

SEPTIMUS 'The Maid of Turkey'! I have it by my bedside! When I cannot sleep I take up 'The Maid of Turkey' like an old friend!

CHATER (*Gratified*) There you are! And the scoundrel wrote he would not give it to his dog for dinner were it covered in bread sauce and stuffed with chestnuts. When Mrs Chater read that, she wept, sir, and would not give herself to me for a fortnight—which recalls me to my purpose—

~~**SEPTIMUS** The new poem, however, will make your name perpetual—~~