

~~LADY CROOM~~ There was more posing *at* the pictures than *in* them. His companion likewise reversed the custom of the Academy that the ladies viewing wear more than the ladies viewed—well, enough! Let him be hanged there for a Lamb. I have enough with Mr Noakes, who is to a garden what a bull is to a china shop.

~~This as Noakes enters.~~

~~THOMASINA~~ The Emperor of Irregularity!

~~She settles down to drawing the diagram which is to be the third item in the surviving portfolio.~~

LADY CROOM Mr Noakes!

NOAKES Your ladyship—

LADY CROOM What have you done to me!

NOAKES Everything is satisfactory, I assure you. A little behind, to be sure, but my dam will be repaired within the month—

LADY CROOM (*Banging the table*) Hush!

In the silence, the steam engine thumps in the distance.

Can you hear, Mr Noakes?

NOAKES (*Pleased and proud*) The Improved Newcomen steam pump—the only one in England!

LADY CROOM That is what I object to. If everybody had his own I would bear my portion of the agony without complaint. But to have been singled out by the only Improved Newcomen steam pump in England, this is hard, sir, this is not to be borne.

NOAKES Your lady—

LADY CROOM And for what? My lake is drained to a ditch for no purpose I can understand, unless it be that snipe and curlew have deserted three counties so that they may be shot in our swamp. What you painted as forest is a mean plantation, your greenery is mud, your waterfall is wet mud, and your mount is an opencast mine for

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the mud that was lacking in the dell. (*Pointing through the window.*) What is that cowshed?

NOAKES The hermitage, my lady?

LADY CROOM It is a cowshed.

NOAKES Madam, it is, I assure you, a very habitable cottage, properly founded and drained, two rooms and a closet under a slate roof and a stone chimney—

LADY CROOM And who is to live in it?

NOAKES Why, the hermit.

LADY CROOM Where is he?

NOAKES Madam?

LADY CROOM You surely do not supply a hermitage without a hermit?

NOAKES Indeed, madam—

LADY CROOM Come, come, Mr Noakes. If I am promised a fountain I expect it to come with water. What hermits do you have?

NOAKES I have no hermits, my lady.

LADY CROOM Not one? I am speechless.

NOAKES I am sure a hermit can be found. One could advertise.

LADY CROOM Advertise?

NOAKES In the newspapers.

LADY CROOM But surely a hermit who takes a newspaper is not a hermit in whom one can have complete confidence.

NOAKES I do not know what to suggest, my lady.

~~SEPTIMIUS~~ Is there room for a piano?

~~NOAKES (*Baffled*) A piano?~~