



HANNAH 'The Couch of Eros'. Is it any good?

BERNARD Quite surprising.

HANNAH You think there's a book in him?

BERNARD No, no—a monograph perhaps for the *Journal of English Studies*. There's almost nothing on Chater, not a word in the *DNB*, of course—by that time he'd been completely forgotten.

HANNAH Family?

BERNARD Zilch. There's only one other Chater in the British Library database.

HANNAH Same period?

BERNARD Yes, but he wasn't a poet like our Ezra, he was a botanist who described a dwarf dahlia in Martinique and died there after being bitten by a monkey.

HANNAH And Ezra Chater?

BERNARD He gets two references in the periodical index, one for each book, in both cases a substantial review in the *Piccadilly Recreation* thrice weekly folio sheet, but giving no personal details.

HANNAH And where was this (*the book*)?

BERNARD Private collection. I've got a talk to give next week, in London, and I think Chater is interesting, so anything on him, or this Septimus Hodge, Sidley Park, any leads at all ... I'd be most grateful.

Pause.

HANNAH Well! This is a new experience for me. A grovelling academic.

BERNARD Oh, I say.

HANNAH Oh, but it is. All the academics who reviewed my book patronized it.

BERNARD Surely not.

HANNAH - BERNARD

HANNAH Surely yes. The Byron gang unzipped their flies and patronized all over it. Where is it you don't bother to teach, by the way?

BERNARD Oh, well, Sussex, actually.

HANNAH Sussex. (*She thinks a moment.*) Nightingale. Yes; a thousand words in the *Observer* to see me off the premises with a pat on the bottom. You must know him.

BERNARD As I say, I'm in your hands.

HANNAH Quite. Say please, then.

BERNARD Please.

HANNAH Sit down, do.

BERNARD Thank you.

He takes a chair. She remains standing. Possibly she smokes; if so, perhaps now. A short cigarette-holder sounds right, too. Or brown-paper cigarillos.

HANNAH How did you know I was here?

BERNARD Oh, I didn't. I spoke to the son on the phone but he didn't mention you by name ... and then he forgot to mention me.

HANNAH Valentine. He's at Oxford, technically.

BERNARD Yes, I met him. Brideshead Regurgitated.

HANNAH My fiancé.

She holds his look.

BERNARD (*Pause*) I'll take a chance. You're lying.

HANNAH (*Pause*) Well done, Bernard.

BERNARD Christ.

HANNAH He calls me his fiancée.

BERNARD Why?