

SCENE VII

Valentine and Chloë are at the table. Gus is in the room.

Chloë is reading from two Saturday newspapers. She is wearing workaday period clothes, a Regency dress, no hat.

Valentine is pecking at a portable computer. He is wearing unkempt Regency clothes, too.

The clothes have evidently come from a large wicker laundry hamper, from which Gus is producing more clothes to try on himself. He finds a Regency coat and starts putting it on.

The objects on the table now include two geometrical solids, pyramid and cone, about twenty inches high, of the type used in a drawing lesson; and a pot of dwarf dahlias (which do not look like modern dahlias.)

CHLOË 'Even in Arcadia—Sex, Literature and Death at Sidley Park'. Picture of Byron.

VALENTINE Not of Bernard?

CHLOË 'Byron Fought Fatal Duel, Says Don' . . . Valentine, do you think I'm the first person to think of this?

VALENTINE No.

CHLOË I haven't said yet. The future is all programmed like a computer—that's a proper theory, isn't it?

VALENTINE The deterministic universe, yes.

CHLOË Right. Because everything including us is just a lot of atoms bouncing off each other like billiard balls.

VALENTINE Yes. There was someone, forget his name, 1820s, who pointed out that from Newton's laws you could predict everything to come—I mean, you'd need a computer as big as the universe but the formula would exist.

CHLOË But it doesn't work, does it?

CHLOË - VALENTINE

VALENTINE No. It turns out the maths is different.

CHLOË No, it's all because of sex.

VALENTINE Really?

CHLOË That's what I think. The universe is deterministic all right, just like Newton said, I mean it's trying to be, but the only thing going wrong is people fancying people who aren't supposed to be in that part of the plan.

VALENTINE Ah. The attraction that Newton left out. All the way back to the apple in the garden. Yes. (Pause.) Yes, I think you're the first person to think of this.

Hannah enters, carrying a tabloid paper, and a mug of tea.

HANNAH Have you seen this? 'Bonking Byron Shot Poet'.

CHLOË (Pleased) Let's see.

Hannah gives her the paper, smiles at Gus.

VALENTINE He's done awfully well, hasn't he? How did they all know?

HANNAH Don't be ridiculous. (To Chloë) Your father wants it back.

CHLOË All right.

HANNAH What a fool.

CHLOË Jealous. I think it's brilliant. (She gets up to go. To Gus) Yes, that's perfect, but not with trainers. Come on, I'll lend you a pair of flatties, they'll look period on you—

HANNAH Hello, Gus. You all look so romantic.

Gus following Chloë out, hesitates, smiles at her.

CHLOË (Pointedly) Are you coming?

She holds the door for Gus and follows him out, leaving a sense of her disapproval behind her.