

→ THOMASINA Septimus, what is carnal embrace?

SEPTIMUS Carnal embrace is the practice of throwing one's arms around a side of beef.

THOMASINA Is that all?

SEPTIMUS No ... a shoulder of mutton, a haunch of venison well hugged, an embrace of grouse ... *caro, carnis*; feminine; flesh.

THOMASINA Is it a sin?

SEPTIMUS Not necessarily, my lady, but when carnal embrace is sinful it is a sin of the flesh, QED. We had *caro* in our Gallic Wars—'The Britons live on milk and meat'—'*lacte et carne vivunt*'. I am sorry that the seed fell on stony ground.

THOMASINA That was the sin of Onan, wasn't it, Septimus?

SEPTIMUS Yes. He was giving his brother's wife a Latin lesson and she was hardly the wiser after it than before. I thought you were finding a proof for Fermat's last theorem.

THOMASINA It is very difficult, Septimus. You will have to show me how.

SEPTIMUS If I knew how, there would be no need to ask *you*. Fermat's last theorem has kept people busy for a hundred and fifty years, and I hoped it would keep *you* busy long enough for me to read Mr Chater's poem in praise of love with only the distraction of its own absurdities.

THOMASINA Our Mr Chater has written a poem?

SEPTIMUS He believes he has written a poem, yes. I can see that there might be more carnality in your algebra than in Mr Chater's 'Couch of Eros'.

THOMASINA Oh, it was not my algebra. I heard Jellaby telling cook that Mrs Chater was discovered in carnal embrace in the gazebo.

SEPTIMUS (Pause) Really? With whom, did Jellaby happen to say?

Thomasina considers this with a puzzled frown.

THOMASINA - SEPTIMUS

THOMASINA What do you mean, with whom?

SEPTIMUS With what? Exactly so. The idea is absurd. Where did this story come from?

THOMASINA Mr Noakes.

SEPTIMUS Mr Noakes!

THOMASINA Papa's landskip gardener. He was taking bearings in the garden when he saw—through his spyglass—Mrs Chater in the gazebo in carnal embrace.

SEPTIMUS And do you mean to tell me that Mr Noakes told the butler?

THOMASINA No. Mr Noakes told Mr Chater. *Jellaby* was told by the groom, who overheard Mr Noakes telling Mr Chater, in the stable yard.

SEPTIMUS Mr Chater being engaged in closing the stable door.

THOMASINA What do you mean, Septimus?

SEPTIMUS So, thus far, the only people who know about this are Mr Noakes the landskip architect, the groom, the butler, the cook and, of course, Mrs Chater's husband, the poet.

THOMASINA And Arthur, who was cleaning the silver, and the bootboy. And now you.

SEPTIMUS Of course. What else did he say?

THOMASINA Mr Noakes?

SEPTIMUS No, not Mr Noakes. *Jellaby*. You heard *Jellaby* telling the cook.

THOMASINA Cook hushed him almost as soon as he started. *Jellaby* did not see that I was being allowed to finish yesterday's upstairs' rabbit pie before I came to my lesson. I think you have not been candid with me, Septimus. A gazebo is not, after all, a meat larder.

SEPTIMUS I never said my definition was complete.

THOMASINA Is carnal embrace kissing?

SEPTIMUS Yes.

THOMASINA And throwing one's arms around Mrs Chater?

SEPTIMUS Yes. Now, Fermat's last theorem—

THOMASINA I thought as much. I hope you are ashamed.

SEPTIMUS I, my lady?

THOMASINA If *you* do not teach me the true meaning of things, who will?

SEPTIMUS Ah. Yes, I am ashamed. Carnal embrace is sexual congress, which is the insertion of the male genital organ into the female genital organ for purposes of procreation and pleasure. Fermat's last theorem, by contrast, asserts that when x , y and z are whole numbers each raised to power of n , the sum of the first two can never equal the third when n is greater than 2.

Pause.

THOMASINA Eurghhh!

SEPTIMUS Nevertheless, that is the theorem.

THOMASINA It is disgusting and incomprehensible. Now when I am grown to practise it myself I shall never do so without thinking of you.

SEPTIMUS Thank you very much, my lady. Was Mrs Chater down this morning?

THOMASINA No. Tell me more about sexual congress.

SEPTIMUS There is nothing more to be said about sexual congress.

THOMASINA Is it the same as love?

SEPTIMUS Oh no, it is much nicer than that.

~~One of the side doors leads to the music room. It is the other side door which now opens to admit JELLABY.~~

~~I am teaching Jellaby.~~

JELLABY Beg your pardon, Mr Hodge, Mr Chater said it was ~~important~~ you receive his letter.

SEPTIMUS Oh, very well. *(Septimus takes the letter.)* Thank you. *(And to dismiss Jellaby.)* Thank you.

JELLABY *(Holding his ground)* Mr Chater asked me to bring him your answer.

SEPTIMUS My answer?

He opens the letter. There is no envelope as such, but there is a 'cover' which, folded and sealed, does the same service. Septimus tosses the cover negligently aside and reads.

Well, my answer is that as is my custom and my duty to his lordship I am engaged until a quarter to twelve in the education of his daughter. When I am done, and if Mr Chater is still there, I will be happy to wait upon him in—*(He checks the letter)*—in the gunroom.

JELLABY I will tell him so, thank you, sir.

Septimus folds the letter and places it between the pages of 'The Couch of Eros'.

THOMASINA What is for dinner, Jellaby?

JELLABY Boiled ham and cabbages, my lady, and a rice pudding.

THOMASINA Oh, goody.

Jellaby leaves.

SEPTIMUS Well, so much for Mr Noakes. He puts himself forward as a gentleman, a philosopher of the pictursque, a visionary who can move mountains and cause lakes, but in the scheme of the garden he is as the serpent.

THOMASINA When you stir your rice pudding, Septimus, the spoonful of jam spreads itself round making red trails like the picture of a meteor in my astronomical atlas. But if you stir backward, the jam will not come together again. Indeed, the pudding does not