

SEPTIMUS

CHAPTER I

"I LOVE Nunsmere," said the Literary Man from London. "It is a spot where faded lives are laid away in lavender."

"I'm not a faded life, and I'm not going to be laid away in lavender," retorted Zora Middlemist.

She turned from him, and handed cakes to the Vicar. She had no desire to pet the Vicar, but he was less unbearable than the Literary Man from London whom he had brought to call on his parishioners. Zora disliked to be called a parishioner. She disliked many things in Nunsmere. Her mother, Mrs. Oldrieve, however, loved Nunsmere, adored the Vicar, and found awe-inspiring in his cleverness the Literary Man from London.

Nunsmere lies hidden among the oaks of Surrey, far from the busy ways of men. It is Heaven knows how many miles from a highroad. You have to drive through lanes and climb right over a hill to get to it. Two old Georgian houses covered with creepers, a modern Gothic church, two much more venerable and pious-looking inns, and a few cottages settling peacefully around a common, form the