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This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.
The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

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This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

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Jane Austen, *Emma* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1

Emma Woodhouse was young, rich, pretty, and used to getting her own way. She lived at Hartfield with her father, and for many years Miss Taylor had been the dear friend who filled their home with good sense and warm affection. Emma loved her deeply. So, when Miss Taylor married Mr. Weston and left Hartfield, Emma felt a quiet pain that was new to her. It was not a wild grief, because she truly believed the marriage would make Miss Taylor happy, but the house suddenly felt larger, stiller, and less bright.

After the wedding, Emma sat alone with that feeling for the first time. Her father had fallen asleep after dinner, and the evening looked long before her. She thought of all the years Miss Taylor had cared for her, taught her, played with her, and stayed near her in sickness and health. Miss Taylor had lived in the house, heard every thought, understood every small wish, and never lost patience with her. Emma knew she was lucky in almost every part of her life, but she also knew that a friend only half a mile away was not the same as a friend in the next room.

Mr. Woodhouse woke in his usual anxious mood. He hated change, even happy change, and he could not stop feeling sorry for the bride. When tea was brought in, he said, “Poor Miss Taylor! I wish she were here again. It is a pity Mr. Weston ever thought of her.” Emma answered gently, “No, Papa, I cannot agree. Mr. Weston is a very good man, and Miss Taylor deserves happiness. We will see them often. We can go to Randalls very soon.” But even that simple plan became difficult in his mind. He worried about the carriage, the horses, the distance, and even the servant girl Hannah, until Emma had to laugh and guide him back into a calmer state.

That evening became easier when Mr. Knightley came to Hartfield. He was an old family friend, wise, direct, and one of the few people who ever spoke honestly to Emma about her faults. He brought news from London and soon turned the talk toward the wedding. Mr. Woodhouse repeated his sorrow, but Mr. Knightley said

that Miss Taylor had gained more freedom, not less. Emma, half serious and half playful, then declared, “I made the match myself. I saw long ago that they suited each other.” Mr. Knightley smiled at this and warned her not to be proud of a lucky guess. But Emma enjoyed her own idea too much and said, “Then I must go on. I must find a wife for Mr. Elton next.”

Mr. Weston, the new husband, was a man many people liked. He had been born in Highbury, had a cheerful nature, and in his youth had joined the army. There he met Miss Churchill, a woman from a richer and prouder family. She married him against her brother’s wishes, but the marriage did not bring her lasting peace. She loved her husband, yet she missed the wealth and style of the home she had left. When she died after only a few years, she left behind a little son, Frank. That child was taken in by the Churchills, who had no children of their own, and Mr. Weston let him go because he could then be raised in comfort.

After that loss, Mr. Weston changed his life. He left the army, went into business, worked steadily, and little by little made enough money to buy Randalls, the house he had long wanted. He remained kind, open, and full of life, and in time his regard for Miss Taylor grew into a serious wish to marry her. Now that wish had come true. Highbury approved of the marriage, and many people also began to talk about Frank Churchill, the son who had grown up far away and had never once visited his father’s home. He wrote a handsome letter to Mrs. Weston, and the village praised it so much that the letter almost became a public event.

Mrs. Weston herself felt grateful and content. She loved her new home, respected her husband, and was close enough to Emma to see her often. Emma could see all this clearly, but her father could not. He still sighed, “Poor Miss Taylor,” whenever she left Hartfield. He also made a long trouble over the wedding cake. He thought rich food was bad for everyone because it was bad for him, and he did his best to stop people from eating it. He even asked Mr. Perry the apothecary for support. But the cake was eaten all the same, and peace only returned when every last piece was gone.

Life at Hartfield then moved into its usual pattern. Mr. Woodhouse liked company, but only in the quiet, careful way that suited him. He preferred small

evening visits to large dinners, and Emma often helped him gather a little circle around the fire. The Westons came, Mr. Knightley came, and Mr. Elton, the young vicar, was always glad to spend an evening in such a pleasant house. There were also Mrs. Bates and Miss Bates, mother and daughter, and Mrs. Goddard, who ran the girls' school. Miss Bates was not clever or elegant, but she was so kind, cheerful, and full of harmless talk that people could not help loving her.

Emma did all this gladly for her father, but it did not cure her own loneliness. The gentle talk of these older women often made the evenings seem longer, not shorter. Then one morning a note came from Mrs. Goddard, asking whether she might bring Miss Smith with her that evening. Emma was pleased at once. Harriet Smith was a girl of seventeen whom Emma had seen before and admired for her beauty, and the invitation changed the whole colour of the day.

Harriet was a girl of uncertain birth. No one seemed to know who her parents were. She had been placed at Mrs. Goddard's school by some unknown person and was now living there in a slightly higher position than the other girls. But all that interested Emma less than Harriet's face and manner. Harriet was fair, fresh, soft-looking, and sweet in expression. She was not clever, but she was modest, grateful, easy to guide, and so openly pleased by Hartfield that Emma felt important and generous at the same time.

During the visit, Emma watched her closely and liked her more and more. Harriet spoke simply, without pride, and listened with real respect. Emma quickly decided that such a pretty girl should not stay only among people of lower station. She thought of the friends Harriet had lately visited, the Martins at Abbey-Mill Farm, and at once judged them unfit. Without saying much aloud, she formed a plan in her own mind. "I will notice her," she thought. "I will help her, improve her, and bring her into better company."

Supper was served, and poor Mr. Woodhouse suffered through it as he always did. He liked the old custom of a supper table, but hated the thought of anyone eating too much. So he urged soft eggs, thin gruel, and tiny bits of tart, warning each guest as if danger sat on every plate. Emma let him speak and then quietly made sure that everyone was actually comfortable and well fed. Harriet, who had

come both excited and afraid, went home glowing with pleasure. Emma had shaken hands with her, spoken kindly to her all evening, and made her feel welcome. By the end of the night, Emma was sure of one thing: she had found a new friend, and perhaps a new project too.

Part 2

Harriet Smith soon became a regular part of life at Hartfield. Emma liked to act quickly when she had made up her mind, and she now told Harriet to come often, walk with her, and think of Hartfield as a place where she would always be welcome. This pleased Harriet deeply. Emma was pleased too, because she had found someone who was easy to guide, ready to admire, and happy to follow. Since Mrs. Weston's marriage, Emma had often felt the loss of a daily companion, and Harriet seemed ready to fill that empty place.

The more Emma saw of her, the more certain she felt. Harriet was not clever, and she did not see deeply into people or situations, but she had a soft temper, a thankful heart, and a natural respect for anyone she thought above her. Emma liked all this very much. She did not want another friend like Mrs. Weston, because such a friend could not be replaced. What she wanted now was someone to help, shape, and influence. In Harriet, she believed she had found exactly that kind of young friend.

Emma first tried to learn who Harriet's parents were, but Harriet could tell her almost nothing. She had accepted what Mrs. Goddard had told her and had not asked many questions beyond that. Emma could not understand such quiet acceptance. If she herself had been in Harriet's place, she thought she would have discovered the truth long before. Still, Harriet's uncertainty seemed to Emma less like a disgrace than like an unfinished story. It gave her more reason to think Harriet should be raised, polished, and carefully placed among better people.

Harriet spoke most freely about Mrs. Goddard's school and about the Martins of Abbey-Mill Farm, where she had lately spent two happy months. Emma let her talk and listened with amusement. Harriet described the house, the garden, the

servants, the cows, the summer-house, and all the small comforts of country life with full delight. She said Mrs. Martin had two parlours and many useful things in the house. She spoke as if all of it were wonderful, and Emma smiled at the simple joy in her voice, even while she judged the whole circle beneath Harriet.

When Emma learned more clearly that Mr. Martin was not married, she began to feel a new kind of interest. Harriet spoke of him warmly and without effort. She said he was good-humoured, helpful, and always ready to please. He had walked far to bring her walnuts because she had once said she liked them, and he had taken pains to amuse her in many other small ways. Harriet also repeated a remark from Mrs. Martin, who had said that any man who was so good a son would surely be a good husband one day. Emma heard that sentence very sharply and thought at once, “Mrs. Martin knows what she is doing.”

Emma then began to question Harriet more carefully. Did Mr. Martin read? What did he read? What did he look like? Harriet answered with gentle eagerness. He read some useful books, some pieces aloud in the evening, and wanted to borrow novels because Harriet had mentioned them. He was not handsome, she admitted, though she no longer thought him plain as she had at first. Emma listened to all this and drew her own conclusion. In her mind, Robert Martin was a respectable young farmer, but only a farmer still, and therefore not the right man for Harriet.

As they walked together one day on the Donwell road, they met Mr. Martin himself. He spoke with Harriet for a few moments while Emma stood a little apart and watched him. He looked neat, healthy, and sensible, but Emma saw nothing refined in him. His manner seemed awkward, his voice rough, and his whole appearance far below what she wanted for Harriet. When Harriet came back to her with bright eyes and quick breath, asking what she thought of him, Emma gave her answer plainly. She said he was very plain indeed and had no gentleness or ease in his manner.

Harriet, who had just been happy, became quieter at once. She admitted that Mr. Martin was not like Mr. Knightley. Emma then pressed further and compared him not only with Mr. Knightley, but also with Mr. Weston and Mr. Elton. She

wanted Harriet to feel the difference between a farmer and a gentleman in every movement, every tone of voice, every silence. Harriet did not resist strongly. She still spoke kindly of Mr. Martin, but Emma could feel her giving way little by little, and that encouraged her. She believed there was no deep love in Harriet yet, only a soft impression that could still be changed.

Once Emma saw that opening, she moved quickly in her own mind toward a plan. Mr. Elton, she thought, was exactly the man Harriet should marry. He was a gentleman, well placed, pleasant in manner, comfortably settled, and not so great a man that Harriet's uncertain birth must keep her from him. He had already spoken warmly of Harriet's beauty, and Emma chose to take that as proof of growing admiration. To her, the match seemed not only possible but almost obvious. She felt a rising pleasure in the design, as if she were already arranging a happy future with her own hands.

While Emma was busy with this idea, Mr. Knightley was speaking of the same friendship from a very different point of view. He visited Mrs. Weston and said directly, "I do not like this great intimacy between Emma and Harriet Smith. I think it is a bad thing." Mrs. Weston was surprised and defended them both. She said Emma might improve Harriet, and Harriet might comfort Emma by giving her a new object of affection and interest. But Mr. Knightley would not yield. He said Harriet's ignorance was a dangerous kind of praise, because Emma was so used to being admired that such a companion would only make her more certain of herself.

He judged the matter with more severity than Mrs. Weston wished to hear, but he also saw Emma more clearly than most people did. He said Emma had been spoiled from childhood by being clever, admired, and too free. Harriet, in his view, would not gain real strength from the friendship either. Hartfield would only make her less satisfied with the people among whom she truly belonged. Mrs. Weston still trusted Emma's good heart and hoped no lasting harm would come. Yet Mr. Knightley's warning stood firm. Even before Emma's first scheme had properly begun, the novel's central truth had already appeared: Emma was kind, bright, and full of confidence, but she was also dangerously pleased with her own power.

Part 3

Emma now felt more sure than ever that she had turned Harriet's heart in the right direction. Harriet spoke of Mr. Elton with more interest than before, and Emma watched every small look and word as if they were clear signs of a coming marriage. In Emma's mind, the whole thing was almost settled already. She only needed time, a few meetings, and a little help from herself. The more she thought of it, the more pleased she became with her own plan.

A chance soon came which Emma found very useful. Harriet was persuaded to sit for a small portrait, and Emma drew her with great care, softening and improving the likeness in ways that pleased her own eye. Mr. Elton was full of admiration, both for Harriet's face and for Emma's talent, and he gave the whole business a warm importance which Emma read in Harriet's favour. Mr. Knightley, however, looked on with a cooler mind. He thought the picture too flattering, joked about Emma's art, and saw none of the romance that she was finding in every moment.

When the portrait was finished, Mr. Elton eagerly offered to take it to London, have it framed, and bring it safely back. He accepted the trust with such careful delight that Emma felt almost certain of his secret purpose. She thought, "He is acting for Harriet, and everything he says to me is only because I help him toward her." Yet there was already something in his manner that could have warned a better judge. He sighed over the picture and spoke with more softness than the occasion required, but Emma still chose to misunderstand him.

On the very day Mr. Elton left for London, another event broke in upon Emma's pleasant hopes. Harriet came hurrying back to Hartfield in a state of surprise and excitement, with a letter in her hand. Robert Martin had called at Mrs. Goddard's, found her out, and left a parcel from his sister. Inside it, along with the songs Harriet had lent, there was a direct proposal of marriage. Harriet did not know what to do, and so she ran at once to Emma and begged her to read the letter and advise her.

Emma read the letter and was forced to admit that it was much better than she had expected. It was simple, short, respectful, and full of good sense and real feeling. Even so, she would not allow its merit to move her from her plan. She quickly suggested that one of Mr. Martin's sisters must have helped him write it, and then she turned the whole question away from the letter itself and toward Harriet's "future." Emma said, in effect, "You must refuse him. He is not the man for you," and Harriet, weak, kind, and easily guided, let herself be led.

Harriet asked, "But how shall I refuse him? What shall I say?" Emma answered that there was no difficulty, and in practice she shaped almost every line of the reply. Harriet's heart kept softening as she thought of Mr. Martin, his mother, and his sisters, and Emma could feel that, if he had appeared before her at that very moment, Harriet might almost have accepted him after all. That was exactly why Emma pressed her forward firmly until the answer was written, sealed, and sent. When the letter was gone, Emma believed Harriet was safe.

The evening that followed was a mixed one for Harriet. She was low in spirits, and more sorry for Mr. Martin than Emma liked to see. Emma tried to comfort her by turning her thoughts toward Mr. Elton. She spoke of the portrait as if it were then in his hands, delighting him, occupying his whole evening, and opening Harriet's name and beauty to his family. Harriet smiled through her sadness, and Emma took those smiles as proof that her own plan had lost none of its strength.

Harriet spent more and more time at Hartfield after that, and Emma judged it safest to keep her close. On one of those mornings, while Harriet was away for a short visit to Mrs. Goddard's, Mr. Knightley came in. At first he surprised Emma by speaking kindly of Harriet. He said she was a pretty little creature, that her disposition seemed good, and that in proper hands she might grow into a valuable woman. Emma was pleased by this praise, but the conversation soon changed its direction completely.

Mr. Knightley already knew what had happened between Harriet and Robert Martin, and he did not hide his opinion. He thought Martin an excellent young man and believed the match would have been greatly to Harriet's advantage. Emma argued the other side at once. She said Harriet must be a gentleman's

daughter, that Robert Martin was below her in manner and education, and that now Harriet had seen true gentlemen, she could never be content with him. Mr. Knightley answered much more sharply than usual. He said, in plain effect, “Robert Martin has more real gentility than Harriet can even understand,” and he treated Emma’s social ideas as nonsense.

The quarrel then became serious. Mr. Knightley told Emma that if she taught Harriet to expect a man of rank and fortune, she might ruin the poor girl’s future altogether. He said Robert Martin offered safety, respect, and lasting happiness, and that Emma had no right to fill Harriet’s head with grand hopes. Emma, though shaken, would not give way. She still believed her own taste better, her own judgment finer, and her own influence useful. Yet when Mr. Knightley fell silent in real anger, she felt deeply uncomfortable. His last words on the matter were cold and hard: Robert Martin, he said, had suffered no great loss, if only he could be brought to think so.

After he left, Emma did not truly repent. She disliked the quarrel, and she hated having Mr. Knightley’s good sense so openly against her, but she still thought herself right. In her eyes, Harriet had escaped a life below her proper place, and the refusal of Robert Martin was not a mistake but a rescue. So she held even more firmly to the hope of Mr. Elton. She believed the future was still in her hands, though the chapter had already shown something she did not yet understand: whenever Emma tried most confidently to arrange another person’s life, she was usually nearest to error.

Part 4

Mr. Knightley was still displeased with Emma, and for a time he stayed away from Hartfield longer than usual. When he did come, his face showed that he had not forgiven her. Emma felt sorry that he was hurt, but she did not think she had done wrong. In fact, the next few days only made her more certain that her plan for Harriet was succeeding. The framed picture of Harriet came back from London, Mr. Elton admired it in exactly the way Emma wanted, and Harriet seemed to

think less and less about Robert Martin. Emma felt that every sign in the world was now turning in her favour.

The truth was that Emma still talked much more about improving Harriet's mind than she really did to improve it. They were meant to read together, but they rarely got beyond a few pages before easier pleasures took over. Harriet had become deeply interested in collecting riddles, charades, and little puzzles in a special book, and Emma happily helped her with that lighter work. Mr. Woodhouse also tried to remember old riddles from his youth, though he never seemed able to finish them properly. Emma did not want all Highbury to help in this game. She wanted only one man to take part in it, and that man was Mr. Elton.

Mr. Elton soon gave her exactly what she hoped for. One day he left behind a charade which he claimed had been written by a friend for a young lady. Emma read it at once and felt sure it was his own, and that it was meant for Harriet. The answer was "courtship," and Emma explained it with warm delight while Harriet sat in blushes and trembling joy. She told Harriet plainly, "It is for you. He is speaking to you through this." Harriet wanted to believe it, and Emma's confidence made that belief easy. When Emma later returned the paper to Mr. Elton and said she had copied part of it into Harriet's book, he looked embarrassed and answered in a way that seemed to confirm everything Emma had imagined.

The next day, in the middle of December, Emma and Harriet went walking to visit a poor sick family outside the village. Their path took them down Vicarage Lane, and of course they slowed down when they came near Mr. Elton's house. Harriet looked at it with open pleasure and called it sweet and beautiful. Emma, half teasing and half serious, spoke as though Harriet might one day know every hedge and gate in that part of Highbury very well. From there the talk moved in another direction, because Harriet wondered that Emma never meant to marry. Emma answered calmly that she did not need marriage to be busy or content, and that in later life she would have enough affection in the children of her sister and her wider family circle.

During that same walk, Emma also mentioned Jane Fairfax. She admitted that she was tired of hearing Miss Bates speak of her niece without end. Every letter,

every small gift, every little domestic detail about Jane seemed to be repeated in Highbury again and again. Emma said she wished Jane well, but the constant praise of her had become almost too much to bear. Yet when they reached the poor family's cottage, all such small feelings fell away. Emma behaved with real kindness there. She spoke gently, gave advice, tried to bring comfort, and when she left, she told Harriet, "These are the sights that do one good. They make all our other worries look very small."

As they came back into the lane, they met Mr. Elton. He said he too had been going to see the poor family, and for a few moments the three of them spoke only of what might help those suffering people. Emma instantly turned this into romance in her own mind. She thought that to meet on an errand of charity must surely bring Harriet and Mr. Elton nearer to each other. Wanting to leave them alone, she tried one excuse after another to fall behind. She slowed her steps, spoke with a child from the cottage, and finally broke the lace of her half-boot so that she might be forced to stop at the Vicarage. Mr. Elton was delighted to bring them in and show them his house. Emma arranged everything as cleverly as she could, hoping Harriet and Mr. Elton would at last come to an understanding.

For a moment, when she came back into the room and saw them standing together by the window, she felt proud of herself. But nothing decisive had happened. Mr. Elton had been agreeable, careful, and full of attention, yet he had still said nothing plain. Emma therefore decided that he was only moving slowly and safely, step by step, because he did not yet feel sure of Harriet's answer. Even this did not discourage her. She still believed she had pushed the affair forward and that the great event could not be far away. Soon, however, her thoughts had to turn elsewhere, because the arrival of her sister's family was very near.

Mr. and Mrs. John Knightley were coming to Hartfield with their children, and the whole house began to look toward that visit. Mr. Woodhouse worried over the journey, the horses, the servants, the weather, and every other possible trouble, but all arrived safely in the end. Their coming filled the house with movement and noise, though Isabella carefully kept the children from tiring her father too much. She was a loving daughter, a devoted wife, and a tender mother, soft in manner

and always anxious about health. Her husband was very different. John Knightley was intelligent, capable, and respectable, but more reserved, and sometimes sharper in speech than Emma liked.

Emma could forgive many things in her brother-in-law, but she could never bear it when he showed too little patience with her father. That weakness in him seemed especially serious to her. Still, the visit began peacefully. Mr. Woodhouse soon started, as always, on the sad subject of Miss Taylor's marriage, and Isabella answered with quick sympathy. Emma had to explain that Mrs. Weston was not lost to them in the way her father suggested. She said, "We have seen Mr. and Mrs. Weston almost every day since the wedding. They have been very kind. Papa only feels the change too strongly." John Knightley agreed that things seemed to have settled very well at Hartfield.

The talk then moved to Frank Churchill, the absent son whose visit to Highbury was always expected and never quite came. Mr. Woodhouse remembered the handsome letter Frank had written to Mrs. Weston, and Isabella at once declared that such attention must belong to an amiable young man. John Knightley was cooler. He did not speak with warmth about either the Churchills or Mr. Weston's easy way of taking life. Emma did not like that tone, especially where Mr. Weston was concerned, but she kept the peace.

Part 5

Christmas brought the long-expected dinner at Randalls. Mr. Woodhouse had at last agreed to go, though only with much care, much wrapping, and much anxiety. John Knightley had disliked the plan from the beginning and spoke openly against it on the drive. He said people should stay by their own fire on such a day, and he warned that the weather looked worse with every mile. Emma, who was used to his dry way of speaking, listened without much fear, but she could not help noticing that the air was growing colder and the sky heavier.

At Randalls, however, the first hours passed pleasantly enough. Mr. Weston was all warmth and movement, Mrs. Weston was affectionate and cheerful, and

the dinner table gave everyone enough occupation for a time. Emma still watched Mr. Elton with Harriet in her mind, but she also began, more than once, to feel a slight discomfort. There was something in his attention to herself that seemed too pointed, too near, and too personal. Even before the evening ended, John Knightley had quietly warned her that she should consider whether Mr. Elton's object might not be Emma herself. Emma rejected the idea at once and thought her brother-in-law mistaken.

As the night went on, the snow that had threatened all day began to fall in earnest. News from the coachmen brought some relief, but not enough for Mr. Woodhouse. Once he believed there was any danger in staying, he could no longer rest, and the pleasant evening broke apart under his alarm. Emma saw that the party must separate. Mr. Knightley quickly agreed, the carriages were called, and in a few minutes everyone was making ready to leave Randalls through the dark and cold.

The confusion of departure then produced the very thing Emma would not have chosen. Mr. Woodhouse went first in his own carriage with Isabella, and John Knightley stepped in after his wife almost without thinking. That left Emma to be handed into the second carriage by Mr. Elton, and before she could prevent it, the door was shut and they were alone together. Under other circumstances she might even have welcomed a private drive, because she could have spoken of Harriet. But now she felt at once that the situation was dangerous. She thought he had drunk too much wine, and she expected foolish talk.

She tried to keep the conversation cold and safe by speaking of the weather, the road, and the darkness. Mr. Elton would not allow it. Almost as soon as the carriage moved forward, he seized her hand and declared himself with sudden heat. He spoke as if his feelings must already be known to her, as if he had long adored her, and as if acceptance should naturally follow. Emma was shocked into complete clarity. In one instant she understood the whole truth: all that attention around Harriet's portrait, all the warmth, all the little services, had been paid not to Harriet through Emma, but to Emma directly.

She answered him firmly and without delay. She said he was mistaken beyond

all excuse, that she had never meant to encourage him, and that Harriet Smith had been in her thoughts the whole time. Mr. Elton was astonished in his turn, but only for a moment. Then he laughed at the idea that Harriet could ever have been the object of his love, and spoke of her as a girl far beneath him. He made it plain that he wanted distinction, money, and a better marriage than that. Emma, wounded both for herself and for Harriet, grew cold with anger and would say no more than was necessary until the carriage stopped at Hartfield.

The next morning brought no comfort, only shame and hard reflection. Emma now saw that she had been not merely mistaken, but foolishly blind. Mr. Elton's selfishness, vanity, and small ambition stood before her in a new light, and she had to admit that Mr. Knightley had judged him more truly than she had. Yet her deepest pain was for Harriet. She had herself raised Harriet's hopes, fed her imagination, and placed a false future before her. Now she had to think how the truth might be managed with the least possible cruelty.

She was spared one difficulty by Mr. Elton's quick departure from Highbury. He left almost at once for Bath, and his absence gave Emma a little time. Mrs. Weston soon came to Hartfield, and Emma told her everything. Mrs. Weston was kind and sensible as always. She pitied Harriet, blamed Mr. Elton, and understood Emma's pain, though even now the event showed how much danger there had been in Emma's confidence. The two women agreed that Harriet must be helped gently and that Mr. Elton had shown himself much less worthy than they had once believed.

Yet Harriet was not easy to cure. Emma found that she could not simply be talked out of love because she had first been talked into it. Her mind, once fixed on an object, returned to it again and again. Reports of Mr. Elton still came through Highbury, and every small mention of him kept the wound open. Then the worst news arrived: in Bath he had become engaged with remarkable speed to Miss Augusta Hawkins, a young woman connected with Bristol, proud of her small claims to consequence, and ready to value the match highly. Emma despised the haste of the engagement and the vulgar ambition behind it, but she knew at once that this new marriage would strike Harriet more deeply than the proposal in the

carriage had struck herself.

So this part closes with Emma's first great failure fully exposed. She had believed herself clever in reading hearts, generous in guiding others, and safe from personal vanity. The carriage ride from Randalls destroyed all three beliefs at once. Mr. Elton had never loved Harriet, Harriet had been injured by Emma's scheme, and Emma herself had been the true dupe of the story. The snow, the dark road, and the closed carriage door marked the end of her first confident success and the beginning of a much more painful education.

Part 6

After the shock of Mr. Elton's proposal, Emma had to think less of her own wounded pride than of Harriet's pain. She saw clearly now that Harriet had not fallen into this attachment by chance. She herself had fed it, guided it, and almost built it with her own hands. So she began, as carefully as she could, to draw Harriet away from false hope and toward a calmer view of what had happened.

Harriet, however, could not recover as quickly as Emma wished. She still thought of Mr. Elton with softness, and she suffered from the difference between the man she had imagined and the man he had proved to be. Emma tried to make the truth plain without making the pain sharper. She spoke of his selfishness, his ambition, and his want of real feeling, hoping Harriet would come little by little to see him as he was.

Then came the news that made everything worse. Mr. Elton, after only a short time in Bath, had become engaged to Augusta Hawkins, a woman with money, confidence, and a quick readiness to accept him. Highbury at once began to praise her beauty, accomplishments, and fortune, as people often do when a marriage is near. Emma despised the speed of the business and the vanity at its heart, but she could not prevent the story from spreading everywhere.

For Harriet, the engagement was a hard blow, though it also began to cure her. It is one thing to dream over a distant man, and another to hear of his wedding day fixed, his bride praised in every house, and his own happiness loudly

displayed before the world. Emma watched Harriet closely through this trial and was relieved to see that sorrow was beginning to do what argument could not do. The illusion was not gone at once, but it had been badly shaken.

While Mr. Elton's affairs still troubled Highbury, another subject rose beside them. At a dinner at Randalls, Mr. Weston spoke warmly to Emma of his son and said, "We want only two more here—Miss Smith and my son—and then we should be complete." He had received a letter from Frank Churchill and declared with cheerful confidence that Frank would come within a fortnight. Emma answered properly and kindly, though she had not yet formed any strong feeling about the young man.

Mr. Weston then explained, in his open way, that Frank's movements always depended on the wishes and dislikes of the Churchills at Enscombe. Mrs. Churchill was full of whims, and a visit from another family might stop Frank from coming to Randalls at all. Still, Mr. Weston believed he understood Enscombe well enough to judge the matter correctly. Emma listened and chose to hope with him, though Mrs. Weston herself was less sure.

The London family soon left Hartfield, and the house returned to its quieter winter state. Harriet was safer now because the Martins had not renewed contact, and because the Eltons were still away. Emma felt that time and distance were working for her at last. Yet her mind, never still for long, was already turning toward new possibilities.

At last a letter came from Frank Churchill to Mrs. Weston. It was pleasing, graceful, and full of friendly feeling, but it did not bring him to Highbury. Mrs. Churchill was recovering, and Frank still could not name any certain day for his visit. What caught Emma's eye most sharply was one small line in which he remembered Harriet as "Miss Woodhouse's beautiful little friend." She instantly began to imagine that, if he ever cared for Emma and then lost her, Harriet might perhaps one day take Emma's place in his affections.

Emma warned herself not to dwell too much on such guesses, yet she was already doing exactly that. This was her old weakness returning in a new form: she had hardly escaped one mistaken scheme before she was tempted toward

another. So Volume I closes with two movements still unresolved. Mr. Elton is gone but not forgotten, Harriet is wounded but recovering, and Frank Churchill remains at a distance, talked of, expected, delayed, and ready to become the next centre of Emma's imagination.

Part 7

Emma now had one clear task before her: she had to steady Harriet after the Elton disaster and keep her from falling back into painful habits of thought. But this was not easy. Even when Emma believed the subject finished, Harriet returned to it again. One morning, as they walked together, Emma tried to turn the conversation toward the sufferings of the poor in winter, and Harriet answered only, "Mr. Elton is so good to the poor." Emma saw that plain reasoning would not be enough. She needed a new subject, and at once.

Seeing that they were near the house of Mrs. Bates and Miss Bates, Emma decided to go in. She did not often visit them as she ought, because Miss Bates's endless talk tired her, and the little room was always full of small interruptions and common gossip. Yet Emma knew that this neglect had often been blamed, both by Mr. Knightley and by her own conscience. So she said to Harriet that they must call, and she went in partly from duty, partly from strategy, and partly in the hope that numbers and chatter would break the force of Harriet's feelings.

The visit began exactly as Emma expected. Mrs. Bates was kind, quiet, and grateful, while Miss Bates poured out welcome, cake, concern for shoes, concern for Mr. Woodhouse, and then, without pause, moved from the Coles to Mr. Elton. Emma had to sit through fresh praise of him, his popularity in Bath, and the letter that had already been discussed too often. She managed it well enough and shielded Harriet whenever she could, but she was not prepared for the conversation to move next to Jane Fairfax.

Miss Bates, delighted by the importance of her news, produced a letter from Jane and began to explain it before anyone could stop her. Emma had hoped to escape before the letter itself appeared, but she was trapped by Miss Bates's

gratitude and confusion. She learned that Jane would soon come to Highbury for a long visit, that the Campbells were going to Ireland, and that Jane had not been quite well. Emma also heard, by way of Miss Bates's endless explanation, all the outer facts about the letter while still being mercifully spared the full reading of it. At last she rose, pleaded her father's expectations, and escaped into the street feeling lucky that she had avoided the letter itself, if not the whole substance of it.

Jane Fairfax, once Emma was forced to think of her seriously, presented a very different kind of case from Harriet. She was an orphan, taken in and educated by Colonel Campbell out of gratitude for her dead father. She had grown up with every advantage of refined company, excellent teaching, music, drawing, and elegant manners, yet all of that training pointed toward a sad future. Because she had almost no fortune, she was expected in time to become a governess. The Campbells loved her too much to part from her easily, and she herself had put off that hard step as long as she could, but the necessity remained before her like a shadow that could not be pushed away.

Emma could not think of such a fate without some real pity. Jane was not only accomplished but beautiful in a quiet, graceful way that even Emma had to admire. For a short time, on Jane's return to Highbury, Emma softened toward her and believed she might at last judge her fairly. She even imagined that Jane's refusal to go to Ireland might hide some private pain connected with Mr. Dixon, the husband of Miss Campbell, and that there might be sacrifice, disappointment, and honour in her choice to remain behind. In those first charitable moments, Emma could almost have wished to help Jane as she had once wished to help Harriet.

But Emma's good feelings never held long where Jane Fairfax was concerned. The old difficulty soon returned. Jane was too careful, too reserved, too guarded in every answer. She would not speak openly of Mr. Dixon, would not speak openly of Frank Churchill, and would give only the smoothest, safest replies to every question. Emma found this restraint almost insulting. She preferred foolish openness to disciplined silence, and because she could not read Jane clearly, she began once more to suspect hidden meanings everywhere. Her imagination, which should have taught her caution by now, instead began building fresh secret stories.

Mr. Knightley, however, saw Jane differently. After an evening at Hartfield with the Bates ladies and Jane, he said openly that Miss Fairfax had behaved with propriety, taste, and good sense, and he was clearly pleased that Emma had at least shown her every outward attention. Emma answered that Jane was reserved, and Mr. Knightley replied that reserve founded on discretion should be respected. Emma tried to meet him halfway by saying, truthfully enough, “She is so elegant that one cannot keep one’s eyes from her. I do pity her.” This pleased him, because he had long thought Emma unjust to Jane. But Emma’s pity remained uncertain, mixed with irritation, admiration, and wounded vanity all at once.

During the same visit, another piece of news suddenly changed the atmosphere. Miss Bates and Jane came in full of thanks for a gift of pork from Hartfield and full of fresher news still: Mr. Elton was going to be married. The bride was a Miss Hawkins of Bath. Emma started at the announcement more than she wished. She had been thinking of Harriet, of Jane, and of herself, but not of Mr. Elton’s speed. Mr. Knightley had already heard the news and looked at Emma with a kind of quiet understanding that made the moment sharper. Emma answered properly that Mr. Elton would have every good wish for his happiness, yet inwardly she saw at once how hard the news might be for Harriet.

Her fear was justified. Harriet soon came in with a disturbed face and a full heart, but not because she had yet heard of Miss Hawkins. First she told a small story that showed Emma how unstable her feelings still were. Forced by rain to stop at Ford’s shop, Harriet had unexpectedly met Elizabeth Martin and Robert Martin there. Their behaviour had been respectful, kind, and restrained. Robert had even followed her only to tell her a better way to Hartfield through the flooded road. Harriet was deeply shaken by such simple goodness, and for a moment Emma herself could not help pitying the Martins more than before. Still, she pushed those feelings down and tried to comfort Harriet by treating the whole thing as a passing pain.

In the end, to drive the Martins from Harriet’s mind, Emma was forced to give the news she had meant to offer with more care. Harriet’s attention shifted quickly enough. Mr. Elton’s engagement to Miss Hawkins revived all the old pain,

curiosity, regret, and wonder, and the Martins fell back into the distance once more. Emma then saw something useful in the strange timing of the day. Harriet had been softened by Robert Martin's kindness, but also shocked into remembering how impossible that road now seemed. At the same time, Elton's marriage proved decisively that he was lost. So Part 7 closes with Emma still trying to govern Harriet's feelings, Jane Fairfax entering the story as a figure of elegance and concealed difficulty, and Emma herself already slipping back into her old habit of turning silence, reserve, and accident into new hidden plots.

Part 8

Highbury had not known Miss Hawkins for a week before it had decided that she was handsome, elegant, accomplished, and charming. Such is the kindness of the world toward a woman who is about to marry. When Mr. Elton returned, engaged and triumphant, he did everything he could to spread the glory of his success. He had gone away hurt and angry, but he came back smiling, satisfied, and eager to show that he had done very well for himself. Emma saw at once that he now cared nothing for her and was only too ready to insult Harriet by his happiness. She also saw, more sharply than before, how much vanity and self-interest lay under his good manners.

The great advantage of Augusta Hawkins, beyond her supposed beauty and merit, was money. She had ten thousand pounds, or at least enough for everyone to call it ten, and that fact gave the story much of its brightness in Mr. Elton's eyes. Emma, however, was not impressed by her family. Miss Hawkins came from Bristol, had no old name, no special distinction, and no connection that need frighten Harriet by its grandeur. Emma even found some bitter comfort in that thought. After all Mr. Elton's pride and contempt for Harriet, he had not really married above her in blood or station, only above her in money. Still, that knowledge could not ease Harriet's heart.

Harriet continued to suffer in the restless way of a gentle, dependent nature that has once been led into love. She was always seeing Mr. Elton from a distance,

almost meeting him, just missing him, hearing his voice, or hearing someone else speak of him with praise. Every little report about his wedding plans, his furniture, his servants, or his bride kept him alive in her imagination. Emma could see that Harriet was not a girl who could easily stop loving once she had begun. She also saw, with discomfort, that the Martins were useful in only one way now: when Harriet thought of Robert Martin, she forgot Elton for a while, and when Elton came sharply back, the Martins faded again. It was a bad balance, but for the moment it was all Emma had.

To prevent any dangerous return to Robert Martin, Emma at last decided that Harriet must pay a formal visit to Abbey-Mill Farm and no more. She would drive her there, leave her only a short time, and then return before feeling and habit could become warm again. Harriet had little heart for the visit even before it began, because she had just seen a trunk being sent to Bath for Mr. Elton. When they reached the farm, the familiar sight of the walk, the house, and the old autumn memories stirred her at once. Emma kept carefully to her plan and returned in a quarter of an hour. Harriet came back alone, agitated, and near tears. The Martins had been civil, but the shortness and style of the visit made everything plain: the old intimacy was over.

Emma understood the pain of that moment better than she liked. In the very room where Harriet had once been easy and loved, she had now been received with reserve and dismissed by the return of the carriage. Emma knew how natural it was that the Martins should feel hurt, and how deeply Harriet must suffer from such a change. Yet she still told herself that it had to be done. Robert Martin and his family were too worthy for Emma to despise, but not high enough for her to welcome. It was one of those actions which she could defend in judgment while her heart remained uneasy. Wanting comfort after so much discomfort, she drove toward Randalls.

Randalls at first failed her, because neither Mr. nor Mrs. Weston was at home. But almost at once their carriage appeared, and Mr. Weston called out the happiest news in the world to him: Frank Churchill would come the next day and stay a whole fortnight. His joy was so open and sincere that it swept away, at least for

the moment, the whole worn-out burden of Elton and the Martins. Mrs. Weston confirmed the news quietly, and Emma believed it at once because Mrs. Weston believed it. In that instant the old subject lost its force. She felt her spirits rise, and she hoped that when Frank arrived, Highbury might at last have something new to think and speak about.

The next morning Frank Churchill came with Mrs. Weston to Hartfield, and Emma had her first real chance to judge him. She had resolved beforehand that his behaviour to Mrs. Weston would be the true test. If he were cold, careless, or only fine in language, she would never forgive him. But he pleased her immediately. He was attentive without effort, affectionate without display, and seemed truly glad to treat Mrs. Weston as a friend whom he wished both to honour and to love. Emma felt relieved, and with that relief came a softer judgment of his long absences. A man who could show such feeling now might not have stayed away from his father entirely by choice.

They walked together through Hartfield and then into Highbury, and Frank seemed interested in everything. He wanted to see the house where his father had once lived, asked after the old nurse who had cared for him as a child, and looked with cheerful curiosity at the whole village. Emma noticed that he had much of Mr. Weston’s liveliness and social warmth, and almost nothing of the proud reserve she had been taught to associate with Enscombe. At the Crown Inn he became excited by the old ballroom and declared that dances ought to be held there every fortnight in winter. Emma smiled at his eagerness, though she could also see that he did not fully understand the delicate rules of rank and mixture in a small place like Highbury. Still, his wish for pleasure, movement, and company was natural and young.

The walk then led them toward the Bateses and on to Ford’s shop. Frank laughed over Miss Bates’s endless conversation and admitted that Emma’s warning had saved him from complete defeat on his first visit there. When Emma asked how Jane Fairfax had looked, he said she looked pale and hardly well, though he spoke lightly and carefully. Emma defended Jane’s complexion with some warmth, and the talk soon turned toward Weymouth, the Campbells, and Mr.

Dixon. Frank answered with caution, but he said enough to encourage Emma's imagination. He seemed to know the whole party well, admired Colonel and Mrs. Campbell, and repeated a story which suggested that Mr. Dixon had admired Jane's musical skill very strongly. Emma immediately began to see secret meanings and possible histories in all this.

So this part marks two important entrances at once. Mrs. Elton is approaching as a new social force, vulgar, vain, and ready to make herself felt, even before Emma meets her properly. Frank Churchill, by contrast, enters in brightness, charm, and easy good humour, and Emma is glad to like him. But the deeper pattern does not change. The very moment new people appear, Emma begins again to read hearts, arrange motives, and build hidden stories from small signs. Her first great mistake has not cured the habit that produced it.

Part 9

Emma had once decided that she would never dine with the Coles. They were good people, but they had risen from trade, and her pride had long told her that such a family ought not to take liberties with Hartfield. Yet when the invitation truly came, and she found that nearly everyone she cared to see would be there, her pride gave way more quickly than she liked to admit. The Westons urged her to go, the invitation had been written with much attention to Mr. Woodhouse's comfort, and even Emma had to confess that she wished for the pleasure of the evening. So, after much careful arranging at home, she accepted.

Before the dinner itself, Frank Churchill gave Highbury another example of his strange mixture of charm and foolishness. He disappeared to London on the excuse of getting his hair cut, as if no nearer place could possibly do it. Such an action ought to have looked empty and ridiculous, and yet when he returned cheerful, handsome, and laughing at himself, Emma found it hard to blame him seriously. She told herself that folly did not look like folly in the same way when a lively, agreeable man carried it off with confidence. Even that was a warning, if she had known how to take it.

At the Coles' house Emma was soon rewarded for having gone. The evening promised to be lively, Frank placed himself near her, and his attention seemed marked enough to flatter without alarming her. He was ready for talk, quick in sympathy, and full of the kind of easy pleasure that made every room brighter. Emma felt at once that she was central to the evening, and that the Coles, whatever her old judgment of them, had managed everything very well indeed. It was the kind of social success she enjoyed deeply.

Then came the piece of news which delighted her fancy even more than the dinner itself. Mrs. Cole told the company that a fine pianoforte had arrived unexpectedly for Jane Fairfax. Jane and Miss Bates had at first been puzzled, but everyone was now ready to suppose that it must have come from Colonel Campbell. Emma, however, was not satisfied. She began to think at once of Mrs. Dixon, and then of Mr. Dixon too. If Jane had really been so warmly admired by him at Weymouth, if she had chosen Highbury over Ireland for some hidden reason, then perhaps this gift was not simple kindness after all. Frank Churchill entered eagerly into the game, agreed with her guesses, and encouraged every step of her suspicion.

Emma enjoyed this private theory very much. She was once again reading beneath appearances, once again finding hidden feeling where others saw only ordinary explanation, and once again pleased with her own skill. Frank's agreement was especially sweet to her because it seemed to honour her judgment. He listened, submitted, added little touches of his own, and made her feel clever for seeing what others missed. In truth, the whole subject should have taught her caution. Instead it fed the very habit that had already misled her more than once.

When music began, Emma's pleasure was mixed with something less easy. She played and sang well enough to receive praise, and Frank even joined her in one song, which gave her a brief and pleasant surprise. But Jane Fairfax, once seated at the instrument, showed powers far beyond Emma's. Her touch was finer, her command greater, and her whole performance had a finished grace that Emma could not deny. Harriet, of course, preferred Emma and admired her warmly, but Emma herself knew the truth and felt it sharply. She practiced the next day with

real energy because she had been forced, however unwillingly, to measure herself against a superior musician.

Emma's discomfort with Jane did not come only from music. She found her too guarded in conversation, too smooth, and too careful in every answer. When asked about Weymouth, the Dixons, or Frank Churchill, Jane said nothing plainly enough to satisfy curiosity. She admitted little, denied nothing fully, and wrapped herself in politeness. To Emma, this reserve looked less like modesty than concealment. She became more certain, not less, that some secret feeling lay behind Jane's silence, and she returned with greater force to her old idea that Mr. Dixon had not admired Miss Campbell alone.

A little later, when Emma and Harriet were at Ford's shop, Mrs. Weston and Frank Churchill appeared, and this led them all to visit Miss Bates and Jane again. There Emma found Frank in one of his most agreeable forms, useful, animated, and full of small cheerful services. He had been repairing Mrs. Bates's spectacles, had helped steady the new pianoforte, and spoke as if he belonged in the room and could brighten every corner of it. But beneath that lightness, Emma noticed something else. He seemed bent on trying Jane, watching Jane, and drawing responses from her which she clearly did not wish to give.

He asked pointed questions about the gift, about Colonel Campbell's intentions, and about the exact source of the pianoforte, while Jane answered in a voice of forced calm. He pressed her to play, asked for tunes from Weymouth, and later, at the party, had already amused himself by staring at her unusual hair and going straight to ask about it. Each time Jane coloured, controlled herself, and withdrew behind manner and duty. Emma saw the colour rise and the calm forced back into place, and every such moment seemed to confirm that there was something hidden between Jane and the larger story of Weymouth. Whether Frank meant only play, or whether he knew more than he showed, Emma could not decide.

So this part ends with Emma more entertained than warned by what she sees. The Coles' party has pleased her, the anonymous pianoforte has set her imagination working, Jane Fairfax has again become an object of suspicion, and

Frank Churchill has grown more interesting precisely because he does not move in a straight line. He is charming, lively, and socially easy, yet his attention shifts from Emma to Jane and back again in ways that invite interpretation. Emma, instead of stepping back, moves further in. She feels herself once more in the presence of hidden feeling and secret design, and once more she trusts her reading of both far too much.

Part 10

The evening at the Coles left Emma pleased, but not peaceful. She had enjoyed Frank Churchill's attention, liked the praise of the room, and felt once more that she had been important in company. Yet two things still troubled her. One was Jane Fairfax's superior music, which Emma could not honestly deny. The other was Jane's manner itself, so smooth, careful, and guarded that Emma felt shut out by it at every turn.

The next morning Mr. Knightley came to Hartfield and spoke warmly of the whole evening. He said that Emma and Jane had given everyone great pleasure, and he was particularly glad that Emma had shown Jane every proper attention. Emma could not resist pushing the subject further. Since Mrs. Weston had lately guessed that Mr. Knightley might admire Jane too much, Emma tried to test him by little remarks and half-jokes. Mr. Knightley answered plainly that he had never thought of Jane in that way, though he admired her very much and thought her a charming young woman.

Even in denying any thought of marriage, he gave Emma something to hold on to. He said Jane had one fault: she was too reserved, not open enough for his taste. Emma was almost glad to hear of any fault in Jane at all. When he left, she turned triumphantly to Mrs. Weston and repeated his answer as if the question were fully settled. But Mrs. Weston, who was gentler and often wiser in such matters, only smiled and said that a man who talked so much about not loving a woman might perhaps end by doing exactly that. Emma laughed and rejected the idea completely.

This was one more sign of Emma's old weakness. She still preferred her own reading of hearts to everyone else's, even after she had been so badly mistaken before. She could imagine secret admiration in Mr. Dixon, secret vanity in Jane, secret preference in Frank Churchill, but she could not easily believe in feelings that moved in a quiet, direct, and ordinary way. Jane's reserve offended her, and because it offended her, she treated it as concealment. Mr. Knightley's admiration of Jane disturbed her, and because it disturbed her, she tried to turn it into a joke.

Meanwhile Frank Churchill remained lively, agreeable, and uncertain. He pleased Emma whenever they met, and he seemed always ready to brighten a room, support a game, or add spirit to a conversation. Yet there were moments when his ease itself looked suspicious. He could appear full of Emma one hour and then be seen close to Jane Fairfax the next. Emma still chose to believe that his greater tendency was toward herself, while any marked attention to Jane belonged only to chance, playfulness, or her own earlier theories about hidden stories in Weymouth.

Out of this unsettled social life came a new excitement. Mr. Weston planned a ball at the Crown Inn, and at once the whole scheme lit up Highbury. Frank Churchill entered into the idea with enthusiasm, and Emma felt the natural pleasure of dancing, movement, and a larger evening than Hartfield or the ordinary village parties could offer. Harriet too would benefit from it, Emma thought, for gaiety and company might help keep old regrets at a distance. Even Mr. Woodhouse, though never happy about such things, could be brought to endure it better in May than he ever could in February.

But the expected pleasure did not come at once. As so often happened where Frank Churchill was concerned, the Churchills and Enscombe stood in the way. Plans had to bend before letters, illnesses, and changes that came from elsewhere. Emma felt again how little depended on Frank's own will, or at least how little seemed to. The ball was delayed, and expectation had to live longer on promises than on performance. This disappointment did not deeply wound Emma, but it kept the whole village in a state of hopeful uncertainty.

At last matters improved. The Churchills moved to Richmond, Frank wrote in

a better tone, and Mr. Weston's ball became once more a real thing instead of a pleasant idea. Preparations were resumed, and a few short days now stood between Highbury and its long-promised evening of happiness. Emma's spirits rose with the general excitement. A public dance meant display, comparison, shifting partners, and fresh evidence for all the guesses people were already making about one another.

So this part closes not with a decision, but with a pause full of expectation. Emma has not learned caution as fully as she should. Jane Fairfax still remains to her a puzzle she thinks she can solve, Mr. Knightley's feelings still seem to her safely under control, and Frank Churchill still glitters before her without becoming clear. Around all these uncertainties stands the coming ball, delayed once, now restored, and ready to bring many of these half-formed feelings into a brighter and more dangerous public light.

Part 11

By this point, Emma had no difficulty understanding what sort of woman Mrs. Elton was. She was active, self-satisfied, endlessly sure of her own importance, and determined to lead wherever she entered. She talked of Bath habits, Bristol connections, and above all of Maple Grove, her brother-in-law Mr. Suckling's place, as though those names were enough to settle every question of taste and rank. Wherever she went, she carried with her the tone of a person who believed she must improve the people around her. Emma could not respect her, and she found it increasingly hard even to endure her.

Yet Emma had to behave properly. The Eltons were receiving invitations from every side, and if Hartfield did less than others, Emma knew people might call her resentful. So a dinner for Mr. and Mrs. Elton had to be given. She prepared herself for it as a duty, not a pleasure. Mrs. Elton, for her part, accepted country attentions with cheerful superiority, saying she and her husband were in danger of being "quite the fashion," and treating Highbury as a place that would have been dull without such resources as her own.

At Hartfield, Mrs. Elton soon made herself plain. She talked a great deal, praised herself while seeming to praise others, and spoke to Emma in a tone of easy equality that was more offensive than open rudeness. Emma could see that Mrs. Elton wished to establish a special intimacy with her, and to do so on the assumption that both of them, as women with carriages and position, must naturally act as leaders in Highbury. That assumption alone was enough to make Emma cold. She had no wish to be claimed, guided, or used by such a woman.

The worst part of Mrs. Elton's manner, however, appeared when she turned toward Jane Fairfax. She had fixed on Jane as a person to notice, manage, and assist. She spoke of her with loud admiration, promised to introduce her everywhere, planned musical parties for her, and declared herself always on the watch for an "eligible situation." She even spoke of giving Jane a seat in the barouche-landau during future exploring parties, as if such patronage must be received with gratitude. Emma, listening, felt a strange mixture of disgust and pity. She thought, with justice, that whatever mistakes Jane might once have made, she had not deserved this kind of protection.

Miss Bates, of course, was delighted. She received every attention to Jane with simple warmth and endless thanks, and could see in Mrs. Elton only an amiable, affable, delightful friend. Emma could almost laugh at such innocence, but what truly surprised her was Jane herself. Jane accepted visits, walks, invitations, and long hours at the Vicarage with a patience Emma had not believed possible. Emma could not imagine how Jane's pride or taste endured it. The whole thing made Jane more puzzling than ever.

Emma therefore returned once more to her favourite habit: she began to invent hidden reasons. The Campbells were still inviting Jane urgently to join them, and Mrs. Dixon in particular was said to be pressing her to come. Means could be found, servants sent, and every difficulty overcome; yet Jane still refused. Emma decided that some stronger motive must be holding her back. She treated Jane's refusal as proof that there was indeed some deeper history, some fear or caution connected with the Dixons, and that Jane's present endurance of Mrs. Elton must belong to that same concealed story.

A later outdoor party only sharpened Emma's sense of Mrs. Elton's character. While conversation wandered through strawberries, gardens, Bristol, Maple Grove, and every other subject Mrs. Elton could turn toward herself, Emma was forced to overhear her pressing upon Jane a possible governess position with a family known through her own wide circle. Mrs. Elton was all heat, eagerness, and triumph, and she would hardly take "no" for an answer. Jane, though vexed and more pointed than usual, still had to defend herself within the bounds of politeness. At last she proposed that they should all walk and see more of the grounds, and Emma understood that she had simply reached the limit of what she could bear.

Even where Jane was concerned, Emma was not the only one observing closely. Mr. Knightley, though he disliked Mrs. Elton's manners, judged Jane more generously. He believed Jane had strong feeling, patience, and self-control, and that if she accepted the Eltons' attentions, it was not because she admired them, but because she had too few other attentions offered her. This was a quiet reproach to Emma, and she felt it. The thought that Jane might endure Mrs. Elton partly because better people had not done enough for her struck home more than Emma wished to show.

Mrs. Elton has fully entered Highbury and is now impossible to ignore: vain, busy, patronizing, and convinced of her own perfect style. Jane Fairfax, far from escaping discomfort, becomes one of the main objects of Mrs. Elton's management. Emma, meanwhile, watches all this with sharper eyes than before, but not with truer judgment. She sees what is vulgar in Mrs. Elton very clearly, yet she still answers Jane's reserve not with patience, but with more suspicion and more guesswork than the truth can support.

Part 12

The social pressure around Jane Fairfax now grew stronger, not weaker. Mrs. Elton had fully taken possession of her as a person to notice, advise, arrange, and almost display before the village. Whenever they were together, Mrs. Elton spoke

as though Jane must naturally be grateful for every visit, every plan, every suggestion, and every offer of help. Emma, watching this, felt not only irritation with Mrs. Elton, but a more serious pity for Jane, who had to bear all of it with steady politeness.

In company, this became more and more unpleasant. Mrs. Elton would draw Jane away, speak to her in half-whispers, leave Emma and Mrs. Weston outside the circle, and yet still manage to make the whole room feel the force of her officious kindness. Jane tried at times to hold her back, but never with open resistance. She was too disciplined for that. Emma saw clearly enough that Jane was uncomfortable, yet she still did not read that discomfort with complete fairness. She continued to think there must be some hidden reason for Jane's conduct beyond the plain one that Jane had too little freedom and too few choices.

At the same time, Emma's suspicions about Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax did not disappear. She still noticed Jane's care over letters, her sudden changes of colour, her efforts at calm, and Frank's irregular manner whenever Jane was near. These signs did not form a truth in Emma's mind so much as a shifting cloud of guesses. One moment she felt certain that Jane was receiving news from someone deeply important to her; the next she still tried to connect everything with the old Weymouth story and the Dixons. Emma's imagination remained quick, but it still moved more quickly than her judgment.

Mr. Knightley, meanwhile, continued to show a generosity toward Jane that Emma could not ignore. He admired her musical powers, respected her self-command, and was openly angry when others treated her without care. He especially disliked the selfish vanity in Frank Churchill's behaviour when Jane was made to sing too much or too long. Emma noticed that anger and felt its justice, but she still would not fully admit what it suggested about Frank. She preferred to think him merely light and careless rather than seriously unfeeling.

Yet the larger movement of the story was now turning away from drawing rooms and half-whispered discomfort toward a more public pleasure. The change at Enscombe, which had already delayed so many hopes, at last worked in Highbury's favour. Mrs. Churchill was moved to Richmond for her health, and

because Richmond lay far nearer than London, everyone began to hope that Frank Churchill could now come and go with much greater ease. Mr. Weston was delighted by this arrangement and saw in it the promise of real neighbourhood at last. Emma was more cautious, but even she had to admit that the prospect looked brighter than before.

One immediate result followed from this change: the long-promised ball at the Crown Inn could finally be fixed. It had never been forgotten, but it had too often remained uncertain, always waiting on letters, illness, or other people's wishes. Now that Frank wrote in high spirits from Richmond and declared he could come for a day whenever needed, Mr. Weston hurried to name the earliest possible time. The village, which had lived so long on expectation, now had a date before it.

Emma felt the rise of this general excitement very strongly. A ball meant movement, display, new arrangements, and public signs that private observers could study afterward. It also offered hope for Harriet. Emma believed that Harriet, now more rational after all her old mistakes, might enjoy the evening without falling again into any dangerous fancy. At the same time, Emma was glad that Frank Churchill would be present, because his ease and cheerfulness seemed made for such an event. She looked toward the ball as something that might settle several uneasy feelings at once.

Even Mr. Woodhouse was brought, if not to approval, at least to resignation. The season was milder, the arrangements around Hartfield were carefully laid, and all the small household fears could be soothed one by one. So Part 12 ends in a pause full of pressure and expectation. Jane is more burdened than ever, Mrs. Elton more active than ever, Emma still half-seeing and half-misreading the people before her, and the Crown ball at last stands near, no longer a plan but an event waiting just ahead.

Part 13

The Crown Inn ball at last justified all the expectation that had gathered around it. The rooms were full, the arrangements lively, and for a time Emma had every

reason to be pleased. Frank Churchill was active and agreeable, the Westons were delighted, and Harriet seemed ready to enjoy the evening in the cheerful spirit Emma had hoped for. Yet the happiness of such a public scene depended on many small acts of kindness, and one act of selfishness soon threatened to spoil it.

The insult came from Mr. Elton. When Harriet, who had no partner at that moment, might easily have been asked to dance, Mr. Elton refused in a way that made his contempt perfectly plain. He had his wife beside him, and both of them behaved with a cold vanity that seemed meant to wound. Emma felt the insult deeply, not only for Harriet's sake, but because she knew that the Eltons' resentment still turned back toward herself. The slight was public, cruel, and impossible to excuse.

Mr. Knightley then did what no one else had done. Without display, but with complete decision, he went straight to Harriet and asked her to dance. The act itself was simple, yet it changed the whole colour of the evening. Harriet was saved from humiliation, Emma was moved almost beyond speech, and the company at large saw a true gentleman's answer to vulgar behaviour. Later, when Emma thanked him, he spoke warmly against the Eltons and admitted more good in Harriet than he had once been willing to allow.

That conversation brought Emma another pleasure as well. She and Mr. Knightley, so often opposed in judgment, found themselves at last in full agreement about Mr. and Mrs. Elton. His praise of Harriet gratified her, and when the dancing began again, she accepted his invitation to dance with him herself. The moment was light, easy, and happy, but it also carried more feeling than Emma fully understood. She came away from the ball not only relieved for Harriet, but unusually pleased with her own understanding with Mr. Knightley.

The next morning, while Emma was still enjoying those recollections, a very different surprise entered Hartfield. Frank Churchill came through the gate with Harriet leaning on his arm, pale, frightened, and hardly able to stand. Once inside, Harriet fainted, and the whole story quickly came out. She and another girl from Mrs. Goddard's had been walking on a quiet road when they met a party of gipsies; Harriet, crippled by cramp after the dancing, could not run when the other girl

fled, and in that helpless state she had been rescued by Frank Churchill.

Emma naturally felt gratitude toward Frank, and she also felt the whole event working at once upon her imagination. A frightened girl, a sudden rescue, a lively young man arriving exactly at the right moment: it was the sort of incident that seemed made to begin an attachment. Harriet herself, though still shaken, spoke of Frank with the warmth that gratitude easily borrows from something softer. Emma at once began to hope that this accident might do for Harriet what reason and management had failed to do: carry her safely away from the remains of older feelings.

A little later, Harriet gave stronger proof that the past at least was loosening its hold. She showed Emma the foolish treasures she had secretly kept from the days of her love for Mr. Elton: a bit of court-plaister and the worn end of an old pencil that had once belonged to him. Harriet now spoke of them with shame rather than tenderness. In Emma's presence she threw them into the fire and declared that there was at last an end of Mr. Elton. Emma could not help thinking, as she watched them burn, that perhaps there might soon be a beginning of Mr. Churchill.

So this part closes with several emotional lines crossing at once. The ball has shown Mr. Elton's meanness and Mr. Knightley's generosity in the clearest possible way. Harriet, rescued first from public insult and then from real alarm, seems ready to leave one attachment behind and move toward another. Emma, pleased by all this, once again feels herself in the presence of a developing story of the heart. Yet the danger remains what it has always been: she is still too ready to turn striking moments into certain meanings, and to trust her own reading before the truth has had time to show itself.

Part 14

June came to Hartfield with no great outward change, yet many inward tensions were quietly growing stronger. The Eltons were still full of plans and importance, Jane Fairfax was still in Highbury when she would rather have been elsewhere, and Harriet's feelings were still being watched and managed by Emma.

At the same time, Mr. Knightley's opinion of Frank Churchill had become more severe than ever. He now believed not only that Frank paid marked attention to Emma, but that there might also be some hidden understanding between Frank and Jane. He did not know how both things could be true together, but he had seen enough looks and half-signs to make him uneasy.

One day, after dining at Hartfield, Mr. Knightley joined Emma and Harriet for a walk, and soon they met the Westons, Frank Churchill, Miss Bates, and Jane Fairfax. The whole party turned in together toward Hartfield, because Emma knew such a visit would please her father, and tea was soon arranged. During the walk, Frank began one of his strange little speeches about Mr. Perry and a carriage, as if he remembered hearing something from Mrs. Weston that she had never said. The talk was light, but the effect was not. It was exactly the sort of restless, playful conduct that made him agreeable to some people and suspicious to others.

At Hartfield, the company settled around the tea table, and Frank soon proposed one of the alphabet games that had amused them before. Emma was pleased and joined him at once. But Mr. Knightley, who had already begun to suspect more than Emma saw, watched the whole scene closely. Frank placed a word before Jane Fairfax, and when Harriet later took it up and solved it, the answer was "blunder." Jane blushed, Frank moved easily on, and Mr. Knightley felt more strongly than ever that beneath these small games there might be something hidden and serious. To him, the letters no longer looked like innocent amusement alone.

Soon after this came the long-expected morning at Donwell Abbey. Emma had known the place all her life by name and neighbourhood, but this was her first real visit there, and it gave her pleasure from the start. Donwell had no showy beauty. It did not try to surprise. Instead it had the deeper charm of order, use, old standing, and quiet abundance. Emma felt that the house and grounds suited Mr. Knightley exactly, and that in seeing Donwell she understood him better as a country gentleman, responsible, active, and at ease among solid things. Though she did not say much of this aloud, the feeling pleased her throughout the morning.

The party gathered there under warm summer light, but Frank Churchill did

not appear at first. Mrs. Weston looked for him anxiously, while Mr. Weston tried to laugh the matter away and blame some sudden change at Enscombe. Emma, however, could not help glancing at Harriet during this uncertainty. Harriet behaved with perfect outward calm, and Emma was satisfied with her self-command. If Harriet had once been ready to turn any striking incident into hope, she now knew better how to govern herself in company. That alone seemed to Emma a sign of growth.

After the cold meal, the company moved out again, and part of the pleasure of Donwell gave way to part of its discomforts. The day was hot, Mrs. Elton was in one of her busiest and most self-important moods, and talk of strawberries soon spread everywhere. For half an hour, she filled the air with chatter about which sort was best, which county grew them better, how they were managed at Maple Grove, and how impossible it was to gather them long under the sun. Her words ran on until even the fruit seemed tired. Emma endured it as well as she could, but her attention was caught more seriously by what Mrs. Elton was saying to Jane Fairfax.

Once again Mrs. Elton had found a “delightful situation” for Jane and pressed it upon her with noisy eagerness. She spoke as though the whole matter were already nearly settled and as though Jane ought to feel nothing but gratitude. Jane, however, answered with firmness sharper than usual. She repeated that she would not yet decide, and at last, with a resolution that showed how much she had suffered, proposed that they should all get up and walk. Emma, who had so often been impatient with Jane’s reserve, could not help pitying her then. To be poor, dependent, and yet obliged to bear such patronage from such a woman was punishment enough without any other secret grief behind it.

The walk led at last into the broad avenue of limes, cool and shaded after the heat. There the view opened sweetly over Abbey Mill Farm, the meadows, the river, and the rich green country beyond. Before she joined the others, Emma saw at once that two figures were a little apart from the rest: Mr. Knightley and Harriet, walking together in what seemed easy conversation. Once such a sight would have pleased her only because it showed Mr. Knightley treating Harriet better than

before. Now it still pleased her, but in a quieter, more curious way. When she came up to them, she found him talking about farming and country matters, and she smiled to think that he seemed almost to say, by his manner alone, that he might speak of such things without any reference to Robert Martin.

The shade, the talk, and the view made this the pleasantest part of the day for Emma, yet even here the morning would not remain wholly simple. Frank Churchill arrived at last, late and not quite in harmony with the rest. His absence had already disturbed the party, and his entrance did not fully restore its ease. There was something hurried, uncertain, and restless in him, as though he had come only in body while his mind was elsewhere. Emma was too ready, as always, to excuse what was irregular in a charming man. But the general effect of the day was not entirely bright. Donwell had shown her beauty, order, and comfort, yet it had also shown strained feelings, social pressure, and hidden movements under the pleasant surface.

So this part closes with one of the novel's most quietly important days. Emma enjoys Donwell and feels new respect for the life Mr. Knightley leads there. Jane Fairfax is driven almost to open resistance by Mrs. Elton's officious kindness. Frank Churchill grows more doubtful rather than less. And Harriet, without meaning to, begins to stand in a new light beside Mr. Knightley. Emma notices the fact, but not its full meaning. As often before, she sees the scene clearly enough, yet does not yet understand where its deepest danger lies.

Part 15

The party at Box Hill never settled into real ease. The place was beautiful, the weather fine, and the company large enough for pleasure, but that very size made natural conversation difficult. People broke into small groups, then came together again without spirit. Frank Churchill, feeling the dullness as quickly as anyone, tried to wake the whole party by turning everything into a game, but his liveliness only showed more clearly how uncomfortable the others were.

Emma, instead of quietly correcting the mood, was drawn into it. She had been

too much flattered by Frank's attention for too long, and in that idle, excited state she was ready to shine at someone else's expense. When Frank called on each person to contribute something clever or dull for general amusement, Miss Bates answered in her usual good-humoured way and laughed at her own talkativeness. Then Emma, carried by vanity and impatience, replied with the cruel little jest that Miss Bates would be limited to only three dull things at once. It was one of those remarks that can pass for wit in the moment because it wounds so neatly.

Miss Bates did not answer with anger. That made the scene worse. She tried to smile, tried to turn the blow aside, and said she must indeed have made herself very disagreeable if Emma could speak so to an old friend. A slight blush showed that she had felt the insult, and the whole party felt it too. Emma had not struck a proud or dangerous person, but a harmless, affectionate woman who had never wished her any thing but good.

Mr. Knightley did not speak at once. The day went on, the outward forms of civility continued, and the drive home was made. But Emma could feel, even before he said a word, that something had gone deeply wrong. She had often been foolish, mistaken, and vain; this time she had been unkind. The difference between those faults was greater than she had allowed herself to think.

When Mr. Knightley found her alone afterward, he spoke with a directness that pierced her at once. He told her she had been wrong, not merely in taste, but in heart. Miss Bates, he said in effect, had age, poverty, and dependence enough to bear already, and Emma had used her greater ease, rank, and spirits only to humiliate her. No one else could have corrected Emma so completely, because no one else joined affection with truth in quite that way.

Emma did not defend herself for long. At first she tried to treat the matter lightly, as though the words had been no more than foolish play. But Mr. Knightley's seriousness destroyed that refuge immediately. She saw the whole scene again from outside herself: Miss Bates talking freely because she trusted, Emma striking because she was bored, and a room full of people forced to witness the insult. Shame then did what argument alone could not do.

That night she suffered from a kind of pain which had been rare in her life.

She was not merely vexed at having displeased Mr. Knightley or looked foolish before others. She was truly sorry for the pain she had given. In thinking over his reproof, she felt that it had been just in every part. If she wished to remain the kind of woman she believed herself to be, she had to repair the injury as far as she could.

The next morning she acted on that feeling. She went to the Bateses' house early, determined to show real attention and to bear whatever embarrassment the visit might bring. There she found not resentment, but the same good nature as before, mixed now with trouble about Jane Fairfax's health and spirits. The generosity of that welcome made Emma feel her own fault even more strongly, because forgiveness had met her before apology had fully found its words. So this part closes with Emma at her moral low point, yet also at the beginning of something better: for the first time, pain has taught her not just that she has judged badly, but that she has behaved badly, and that such a fault must be answered by action, not by clever excuses.

Part 16

Emma's visit to the Bateses after Box Hill had not ended her uneasiness. Miss Bates had forgiven her with the same gentle warmth as before, but the household was full of another trouble. Jane Fairfax was unwell in both body and spirit. She hardly ate, refused ordinary comforts, and had lately accepted, through Mrs. Elton's activity, the idea of a governess position which seemed to press on her like a sentence. Emma, who had once been too quick to dislike and suspect her, now felt much more simple pity.

Wanting to be useful, Emma sent some fine arrowroot with a friendly note, hoping that practical kindness might at least be accepted where easy intimacy was impossible. Jane, however, returned it with thanks and with a firm refusal. Later, when Emma heard that Jane had been seen walking in the meadows on the very day she had said herself too weak to go out in the carriage, Emma concluded that Jane would take no favour from her. This hurt her, but it also humbled her. For

once, she could say honestly that her intentions had been right, even if they were not trusted.

Then, about ten days after Mrs. Churchill's death, Mr. Weston came suddenly to Hartfield and asked Emma to go with him at once to Randalls. His manner was hurried, secret, and unlike his usual cheerful openness. Emma could not guess what had happened, except that it must be something of real importance. Once they were out of hearing from Mr. Woodhouse, the truth came quickly. Mrs. Churchill's death had removed the great obstacle, and now the whole hidden story had broken into the light: Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax had long been secretly engaged.

Emma was astonished, but not astonished in only one way. She saw immediately how much she had missed and how much she had misunderstood. The pianoforte, the looks, the awkward silences, Frank's restless behaviour, Jane's reserve, his absences, his sudden appearances, even the teasing at Box Hill and elsewhere—all these things now fell into a new order. What had looked like vanity, coldness, secrecy, or play now appeared as the difficult conduct of two people tied to each other and yet unable to speak openly. Emma felt pity for Jane more strongly than ever. Frank's charm remained, but his selfishness and reckless love of amusement looked much darker now.

Still, even this discovery did not wound Emma where Mr. Weston and Mrs. Weston feared it would. She had never loved Frank Churchill. She could be surprised, embarrassed, and even angry on Jane's account, but not heartbroken for herself. Mr. Knightley soon came, full of concern, expecting to find her deeply hurt by Frank's false attentions. Instead he found her shaken in judgment rather than in affection. That difference would soon matter more than either of them yet knew, but the immediate burden before Emma was Harriet.

Emma knew Harriet must hear the news from her, and she prepared herself for another painful duty. She feared a second disappointment even worse than the first, because Harriet had seemed more self-controlled and more deeply touched this time. Yet when Harriet came in, her manner was so strangely calm that Emma could hardly understand it. Harriet already knew the secret from Mr. Weston, and

instead of grief she showed only surprise. When Emma spoke as though Frank Churchill had been Harriet's object, Harriet stared at her in honest confusion and said, "Mr. Frank Churchill? How could you think I meant him?"

The truth then came out little by little, and each word struck Emma harder than the last. Harriet had never meant Frank at all. The man she loved, the man she thought Emma had been encouraging her to hope for, was Mr. Knightley. Harriet spoke with trembling sincerity of his kindness after the ball, of his gentler manner since then, of the walk at Donwell, of little looks and words that Emma herself now remembered too well. Emma listened in a kind of inward terror, because she could not deny that many of Harriet's proofs were real enough, only fatally misread.

She answered as steadily as she could, warning Harriet that Mr. Knightley stood far above her, and that there were serious objections and obstacles in the way. Yet even while she spoke those cautious words, Emma felt the ground changing under her. This was no longer a question of Frank Churchill, or Jane Fairfax, or any of her old schemes. Harriet's confession had turned suddenly toward the one person whose loss she could not calmly bear. So this part closes not in explanation, but in shock: the secret engagement of Frank and Jane has been revealed, but the truly devastating discovery for Emma is that Harriet has fixed her heart on Mr. Knightley.

Part 17

Harriet's words did not fade after they were spoken. They only grew more terrible as Emma listened. Harriet, modest but hopeful, truly believed that Mr. Knightley might return her affection. She even appealed to Emma's own former language about surprising matches and asked, with touching sincerity, that Emma would not stand in her way if such happiness should really be possible. Emma could only ask one question in return: "Do you really think Mr. Knightley may love you?" Harriet answered quietly, "Yes, I do." In that moment, Emma's whole inner life changed.

She had believed herself shocked for Harriet's sake when Harriet first seemed in danger of loving Frank Churchill. Now she understood the difference at once. The idea of Harriet loving Mr. Knightley was unbearable in a way the other had never been. In only a few minutes, Emma saw the full truth. She loved Mr. Knightley herself. More than that, she felt, with the force of a sudden blow, that he must marry no one but her. It was not a graceful discovery. It came mixed with jealousy, fear, and a bitter sense that she had brought this danger upon herself.

Her self-reproach followed immediately after her self-knowledge. Emma saw, more clearly than ever before, how wrongly she had acted toward Harriet from the beginning. She had raised Harriet above her natural place, encouraged her to think highly of herself, and taught her to expect some great marriage, not because Harriet had earned such hopes, but because Emma had enjoyed guiding her. Now Harriet's boldness in thinking of Mr. Knightley seemed to Emma both shocking and also terribly understandable. If Harriet had grown vain, Emma had helped make her so. If Harriet now reached upward without fear, that too was part of Emma's own work.

Even in that distress, however, Emma would not let herself turn coldly against Harriet. Harriet had done nothing with deliberate unkindness. She had only followed feelings that Emma herself had trained into dangerous directions. So Emma forced herself to remain calm, to speak gently, and to learn how far Harriet's hopes had gone. She did not pity Harriet in the old easy way, because a girl who believed herself loved by Mr. Knightley seemed not miserable but fortunate. Yet she did feel bound to treat her justly, because Harriet had trusted her for so long and had never been guided rightly by the person who ought most to have helped her.

When Harriet was gone, Emma's reflections became even more painful. She could not bear the thought of what such a marriage would mean. To see Mr. Knightley joined to Harriet seemed not only unequal but degrading to him. She imagined the smiles, the sneers, the private laughter, the amazement of his family, and the thousand daily inconveniences that must follow such a union. Yet she could not honestly call it impossible. Men of strong sense had loved unwisely

before. Circumstance, habit, gratitude, and the constant presence of a pretty, admiring girl might mislead even a man like Mr. Knightley. The very fact that Emma could imagine it made her misery worse.

Then came the most intimate part of her discovery. Emma had never before understood how much of her happiness depended on being first with Mr. Knightley. She had always assumed it without naming it. For years she had held the chief place in his regard, at least among the women around him, and had enjoyed that place almost carelessly. Now, under the threat of losing it, she felt its full value. His watchfulness, his truth, his habit of correcting her, his constant nearness to her and to her father, all rose before her as parts of life that had become necessary to her without her knowing it.

Yet this new certainty did not produce hopeful dreams. Emma could not flatter herself easily. Harriet might believe that Mr. Knightley could passionately and exclusively love her. Emma could not believe such a thing of herself. She remembered too well how sternly he had spoken to her after Box Hill. His affection for her, whatever its depth, had always appeared mixed with justice, judgment, and a desire to improve her. She could not persuade herself that he was blinded by love. So even now, while she knew what her own heart wanted, she could not honestly call it hope. The best wish she could safely form was not that he might love her, but that Harriet might be mistaken and that he might remain unmarried altogether.

This produced a strange and unhappy state in her. She wanted him for herself, yet she dared not expect him. She feared Harriet's success, yet she could not bear to think how much Harriet might suffer if those hopes were false. She accused herself, defended him, blamed Harriet, and then blamed herself again for having made Harriet what she now was. No earlier mistake in the novel had pierced her so deeply, because for the first time the error touched not only her pride or judgment, but the one attachment that mattered most to her own life.

Emma has not yet spoken to Mr. Knightley, and she has no clear path before her. But everything essential has changed. She now knows that she loves him, knows that she may lose him, and knows that her own thoughtless management

of Harriet has helped create that danger. It is the most painful truth she has faced so far, and it leaves her with nothing to rely on except patience, self-command, and the uncertain hope that Harriet has read his feelings wrongly.

Part 18

In the middle of all her inward confusion, Emma received the visit she most feared and most desired. Mr. Knightley came to Hartfield in a state of feeling which at first she misunderstood. He had heard the news of Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax, and he believed Emma must be suffering from it far more than she would confess. This mistake gave him unusual seriousness and tenderness, and Emma, who already loved him, could hardly bear the mixture of kindness and distance in his manner. She thought, at first, that he had come only to comfort her in a disappointment she had never truly felt.

But the conversation soon changed. Emma made it plain, as delicately as she could, that Frank Churchill had never engaged her heart. Mr. Knightley, who had long believed otherwise, was so struck by this that he could not hide it. Relief broke through his reserve almost at once, and with that relief came words much deeper than either of them had been prepared to hear. He began to speak not as a friend correcting or protecting her, but as a man who had loved her for a very long time and had at last reached the point where silence was no longer possible.

What followed was the decisive conversation of the whole novel. Mr. Knightley told Emma, in substance, that he had blamed her, watched her, admired her, and cared for her through all her faults and all her growth. He said plainly that he loved her and that he could not now hear of her freedom without speaking. Emma’s answer came with happiness, but also with honesty. She did not play with modest doubt or delay him with uncertainty. She let him see that her heart was his, and that what she had only recently discovered in herself was entirely true. The long history of correction, friendship, trust, and deep affection between them suddenly took its final shape.

Yet even at the height of that joy, Emma could not forget her father. The

thought came almost at once: how could she marry and leave Hartfield while Mr. Woodhouse still depended on her for so much of his comfort? She was too loving a daughter to push that difficulty aside for her own happiness. Mr. Knightley answered with the same practical generosity that had always marked him. If necessary, he said, he would leave Donwell Abbey and come to live at Hartfield. The proposal was unusual and, in its way, a sacrifice, but it suited both his affection and his judgment. To Emma, it made happiness not only sweeter, but more possible.

The following days brought a quieter pleasure. Emma and Mr. Knightley were now united in understanding, and what had once been only habitual nearness became a new and acknowledged relation. She looked back over past conversations, past quarrels, past kindnesses, and saw in them meanings she had not fully read before. The very things in him that had once checked her vanity now appeared among the deepest proofs of his love. Yet even in this happy state, Emma could not enjoy everything without remainder, because Harriet's suffering still stood before her.

Around this time came Frank Churchill's long letter to Mrs. Weston, written after the truth of his engagement was known. Emma read it with eager attention. It explained much that had once seemed only foolish or cruel. Frank described how his attachment to Jane had begun at Weymouth, how they had become secretly engaged, and how the selfishness and power of Mrs. Churchill had forced them into concealment. He also admitted, more openly than Emma could entirely like, that he had often behaved lightly and wrongly in public, partly from vanity, partly from restlessness, and partly from the dangerous pleasure of hiding a serious secret beneath a playful surface.

The letter threw strong light on many old puzzles. The pianoforte, the sudden journeys, the silences, the changes of colour, the teasing at the Bateses', the strange behaviour at Box Hill, and Frank's repeated returns to Emma whenever he wished to hide his real direction—all of it now became more intelligible. Emma felt more tenderness than anger toward Jane, whose difficulties had been heavier than anyone knew. Toward Frank she felt a mixed judgment. She could forgive

much because his affection had been real and because he now wrote with warmth and openness, but she could not forget how much pain his selfish amusement had caused Jane and how near he had come to making Emma herself a tool in his concealment.

So this part closes in joy, but not in simple ease. Emma and Mr. Knightley are now engaged in heart, if not yet publicly and practically settled in every outward detail. Frank Churchill's letter has restored truth to many confused scenes and has cleared Jane Fairfax far more than himself. The future at last seems possible, but it still depends on one difficult point: Mr. Woodhouse must somehow be brought to accept a marriage that even Emma's happiness cannot make him welcome easily.

Part 19

It was a great relief to Emma to find that Harriet herself wished to avoid a meeting. Their last exchange by letter had already been painful enough. Harriet did not openly reproach her, but Emma could feel a shade of hurt beneath the softness of her words, and she could not honestly wonder at it. She knew too well how much false hope Harriet had been allowed to form, and how much of that danger had come from her own earlier influence.

So Emma quickly made a plan. Harriet really had a tooth that needed attention, and this gave Emma a decent reason for obtaining an invitation from Isabella in Brunswick Square. Mrs. John Knightley was delighted to help, especially where any matter of health was concerned, and Harriet was easily persuaded to go for at least a fortnight. Once the visit was settled, Emma felt that Harriet was safe, and that this separation, however sad in one way, was kind in another.

With Harriet away, Emma could at last enjoy Mr. Knightley's visits without the constant pain of thinking that another heart, close at hand, might be suffering because of him and because of herself. She also determined to delay any confession of her own engagement to her father until Mrs. Weston should be safely through the anxiety before her confinement. Emma would not add agitation

where she could avoid it. For a short time, then, she had both happiness and secrecy, though neither could last forever.

In this calmer interval, Emma also turned with better feeling toward Jane Fairfax. She wanted to see her not merely from duty, but from a sense that they now stood, in one quiet respect, nearer to each other than before. Emma had once answered Jane's reserve with vanity and suspicion. Now she was more ready to grant her difficulty, pride, and suffering. That change did not make them intimate, but it made Emma fairer than she had been for most of the novel.

Then, when Emma had begun to think the worst confusion of Harriet's story could only slowly fade away, Mr. Knightley brought news that changed everything. Robert Martin had proposed again, and Harriet had accepted him. Emma was so startled by this that she could hardly trust the report at first. The whole memory of Harriet's recent confidence about Mr. Knightley was still too fresh, and Emma almost feared that Mr. Martin's hope had been misunderstood.

Mr. Knightley, however, left no room for doubt. Robert Martin had spoken plainly, had asked what step he should take next, and had gone on in the proper way to seek out Harriet's connections through Mrs. Goddard. Emma, hearing this, gave up all uncertainty and answered with bright sincerity, "I am perfectly satisfied, and most sincerely wish them happy." Her joy was immediate and deep, because Harriet was now safe, Robert Martin had been restored to his place, and the one fear which had most darkened Emma's own happiness was suddenly gone.

The conversation that followed mattered almost as much. Mr. Knightley admitted that he had taken pains, for Emma's sake and for Robert Martin's, to know Harriet better, and that he now valued her as an artless, amiable girl with good principles and a natural tendency toward domestic happiness. Emma, hearing praise for Harriet from him once again, but now under these altered conditions, could receive it without pain. She even answered with honest humility, "I hope so—for at that time I was a fool," meaning the old period when she had opposed Robert Martin and thought Harriet made for something higher.

So this part closes with one of the novel's most necessary corrections completed. Harriet is no longer looking upward in dangerous error, but turning

back toward the man who has loved her steadily from the start. Emma, in turn, is forced to recognise with full clarity how wrong her earlier judgment had been, and how much better Harriet's future promises to be in the Martins' world than in any false elevation created by Hartfield. The friendship between Emma and Harriet will never again be what it was, but it can now change, naturally and without bitterness, into something calmer and truer.

Part 20

Emma did not have to wait long in uncertainty about Harriet. When the London party returned, she found a chance to be alone with her for an hour, and in that hour every doubt disappeared. Harriet was a little ashamed at first and admitted that she had once been foolish and self-deceived, but that confession seemed to free her. Emma saw, to her great relief, that Robert Martin had now fully taken Mr. Knightley's place in Harriet's mind and that Harriet was able to look toward her future with simple happiness.

Harriet then spoke of the evening at Astley's and of the dinner on the next day with such open delight that Emma could no longer mistake the truth. She understood at last what she had failed to understand before: Harriet had always liked Robert Martin, and his steady love had proved stronger than every false direction given to her vanity. Emma did not pretend to explain every turn of Harriet's heart. She only knew that the right feeling, which she herself had once tried to break, had now returned and held firm.

This correction brought peace not only to Harriet, but to Emma herself. The intimacy between them was naturally changing into something quieter and more fitting. Harriet was now more often engaged with the Martins and less often at Hartfield, and Emma could see that this was not a loss to be regretted, but a proper settling of two lives that should never have been so mixed as they once were. She attended Harriet to church and saw her hand given to Robert Martin with complete satisfaction. Of the three couples in the novel, theirs, though the latest engaged, became the first to marry.

Other lines of the story were also moving calmly into place. Jane Fairfax had already left Highbury and was restored to the comfort of the Campbells' home. The Churchills were in town, and November was now looked to for what remained to be done. Emma and Mr. Knightley had fixed on the intermediate month as far as they dared, because John and Isabella were still at Hartfield and the arrangement best suited everyone except the one person whose consent mattered most.

Mr. Woodhouse was still the great difficulty. When the marriage was first mentioned directly, he was so unhappy that Emma almost gave way. Little by little, however, the idea became less terrible to him. He began to think, not that it was good, but that it might someday happen and could perhaps not be prevented forever. Emma loved him too much to force the matter harshly, and even with Mr. Knightley, Mrs. Weston, Isabella, and everyone else on her side, she could not feel easy while her father still looked on the event as a threat to his comfort.

The final change came from a cause both small and perfectly suited to Mr. Woodhouse's nature. One night Mrs. Weston's poultry-house was robbed, and other poultry-yards in the neighbourhood suffered as well. To most people this was only theft, but to Mr. Woodhouse's fearful mind it became something near housebreaking, a sign that danger might be close at hand every night. In that state of alarm, the strength and steady presence of the Knightleys seemed the only true protection. Since John Knightley had to return to London soon, the thought of George Knightley living permanently at Hartfield suddenly appeared not as a loss, but as a comfort and a safeguard.

So, with a consent far more willing than Emma had once dared hope, the wedding day was fixed. The news surprised the wider world when it spread, but the small circle of true friends approved it with full warmth. Mrs. Weston saw more clearly than ever that no other marriage could have suited Emma so well, because no other man would have left his own home for Hartfield or known how to live patiently and kindly with Mr. Woodhouse. Thus the novel closes with the right order restored: Harriet with Robert Martin, Jane with Frank Churchill, Emma with Mr. Knightley, and Hartfield still made gentle and safe for the father who had

so long feared every change.