

still more so, by a little movement of more than common friendliness on his part.—He took her hand;—whether she had not herself made the first motion, she could not say—she might, perhaps, have rather offered it—but he took her hand, pressed it, and certainly was on the point of carrying it to his lips—when, from some fancy or other, he suddenly let it go.—Why he should feel such a scruple, why he should change his mind when it was all but done, she could not perceive.—He would have judged better, she thought, if he had not stopped.—The intention, however, was indubitable; and whether it was that his manners had in general so little gallantry, or however else it happened, but she thought nothing became him more.—It was with him, of so simple, yet so dignified a nature.—She could not but recall the attempt with great satisfaction. It spoke such perfect amity.—He left them immediately afterwards—gone in a moment. He always moved with the alertness of a mind which could neither be undecided nor dilatory; but now he seemed more sudden than usual in his disappearance.

Emma could not regret her having gone to Miss Bates, but she wished she had left her ten minutes earlier;—it would have been a great pleasure to talk over Jane Fairfax's situation with Mr Knightley.—Neither would she regret that he should be going to Brunswick Square, for she knew how much his visit would be enjoyed—but it might have happened at a better time—and to have had longer notice of it, would have been pleasanter.—They parted thorough friends, however; she could not be deceived as to the meaning of his countenance, and his unfinished gallantry;—it was all done to assure her that she had fully recovered his good opinion.—He had been sitting with them half an hour, she found. It was a pity that she had not come back earlier!

In the hope of diverting her father's thoughts from the disagreeableness of Mr Knightley's going to London, and going so suddenly; and going on horseback, which she knew would be all very bad, Emma communicated her news of Jane Fairfax, and her dependence on the effect was justified; it supplied a very useful check,—interested, without disturbing him. He had long made up his mind to Jane Fairfax's going out as governess, and could talk of it cheerfully; but Mr Knightley's going to London had been an unexpected blow.

'I am very glad, indeed, my dear, to hear she is to be so comfortably settled. Mrs Elton is very good-natured and agreeable, and I dare say her acquaintance are just what they ought to be. I hope it is a dry situation, and that her health will be taken good care of. It ought to be a first object, as I am sure poor Miss Taylor's always was with me. You know, my dear, she is going to be to this new lady what Miss Taylor was to us. And I hope she will be better off in one respect, and not be induced to go away after it has been her home so long.'

The following day brought news from Richmond to throw every thing else into the background. An express arrived at Randalls to announce the death of Mrs Churchill! Though her nephew had had no particular reason to hasten back on her account, she had not lived above six-and-thirty hours after his return. A sudden seizure of a different nature from any thing foreboded by her general state, had carried her off after a short struggle. The great Mrs Churchill was no more.

It was felt as such things must be felt. Every body had a degree of gravity and sorrow; tenderness towards the departed, solicitude for the surviving friends; and, in a reasonable time, curiosity to know where she would be buried. Goldsmith tells us, that when lovely woman stoops to folly, she has nothing to do but to die; and when she stoops to be disagreeable, it is equally to be recommended as a clearer of ill-fame. Mrs Churchill, after being disliked at least twenty-five years, was now spoken of with compassionate allowances. In one point she was fully justified. She had never been admitted before to be seriously ill. The event acquitted her of all the fancifulness, and all the selfishness of imaginary complaints.

'Poor Mrs Churchill! no doubt she had been suffering a great deal: more than any body had ever supposed—and continual pain would try the temper. It was a sad event—a great shock—with all her faults, what would Mr Churchill do without her? Mr Churchill's loss would be dreadful indeed. Mr Churchill would never get over it.'—Even Mr Weston shook his head, and looked solemn, and said, 'Ah! poor woman, who would have thought it!' and resolved, that his mourning should be as handsome as possible; and his wife sat sighing and moralising over her broad hems with a commiseration and good sense, true and steady. How it would affect Frank was among the earliest thoughts of both. It was also a very early speculation with Emma. The character of Mrs Churchill, the grief of her

husband—her mind glanced over them both with awe and compassion—and then rested with lightened feelings on how Frank might be affected by the event, how benefited, how freed. She saw in a moment all the possible good. Now, an attachment to Harriet Smith would have nothing to encounter. Mr Churchill, independent of his wife, was feared by nobody; an easy, guidable man, to be persuaded into any thing by his nephew. All that remained to be wished was, that the nephew should form the attachment, as, with all her goodwill in the cause, Emma could feel no certainty of its being already formed.

Harriet behaved extremely well on the occasion, with great self-command. What ever she might feel of brighter hope, she betrayed nothing. Emma was gratified, to observe such a proof in her of strengthened character, and refrained from any allusion that might endanger its maintenance. They spoke, therefore, of Mrs Churchill's death with mutual forbearance.

Short letters from Frank were received at Randall's, communicating all that was immediately important of their state and plans. Mr Churchill was better than could be expected; and their first removal, on the departure of the funeral for Yorkshire, was to be to the house of a very old friend in Windsor, to whom Mr Churchill had been promising a visit the last ten years. At present, there was nothing to be done for Harriet; good wishes for the future were all that could yet be possible on Emma's side.

It was a more pressing concern to shew attention to Jane Fairfax, whose prospects were closing, while Harriet's opened, and whose engagements now allowed of no delay in any one at Highbury, who wished to shew her kindness—and with Emma it was grown into a first wish. She had scarcely a stronger regret than for her past coldness; and the person, whom she had been so many months neglecting, was now the very one on whom she would have lavished every distinction of regard or sympathy. She wanted to be of use to her; wanted to shew a value for her society, and testify respect and consideration. She resolved to prevail on her to spend a day at Hartfield. A note was written to urge it. The invitation was refused, and by a verbal message. 'Miss Fairfax was not well enough to write;' and when Mr Perry called at Hartfield, the same morning, it appeared that she was so much indisposed as to have been visited, though against her own consent, by himself, and that she was suffering under severe headaches, and a nervous fever to a degree, which made him doubt the possibility of her

Chapter XLV

EMMA's pensive meditations, as she walked home, were not interrupted; but on entering the parlour, she found those who must rouse her. Mr Knightley and Harriet had arrived during her absence, and were sitting with her father.—Mr Knightley immediately got up, and in a manner decidedly graver than usual, said,

'I would not go away without seeing you, but I have no time to spare, and therefore must now be gone directly. I am going to London, to spend a few days with John and Isabella. Have you any thing to send or say, besides the "love," which nobody carries?'

'Nothing at all. But is not this a sudden scheme?'

'Yes—rather—I have been thinking of it some little time.'

Emma was sure he had not forgiven her; he looked unlike himself. Time, however, she thought, would tell him that they ought to be friends again. While he stood, as if meaning to go, but not going—her father began his inquiries.

'Well, my dear, and did you get there safely?—And how did you find my worthy old friend and her daughter?—I dare say they must have been very much obliged to you for coming. Dear Emma has been to call on Mrs and Miss Bates, Mr Knightley, as I told you before. She is always so attentive to them!'

Emma's colour was heightened by this unjust praise; and with a smile, and shake of the head, which spoke much, she looked at Mr Knightley.—It seemed as if there were an instantaneous impression in her favour, as if his eyes received the truth from hers, and all that had passed of good in her feelings were at once caught and honoured.—He looked at her with a glow of regard. She was warmly gratified—and in another moment

There was nothing in all this either to astonish or interest, and it caught Emma's attention only as it united with the subject which already engaged her mind. The contrast between Mrs Churchill's importance in the world, and Jane Fairfax's, struck her; one was every thing, the other nothing—and she sat musing on the difference of woman's destiny, and quite unconscious on what her eyes were fixed, till roused by Miss Bates's saying,

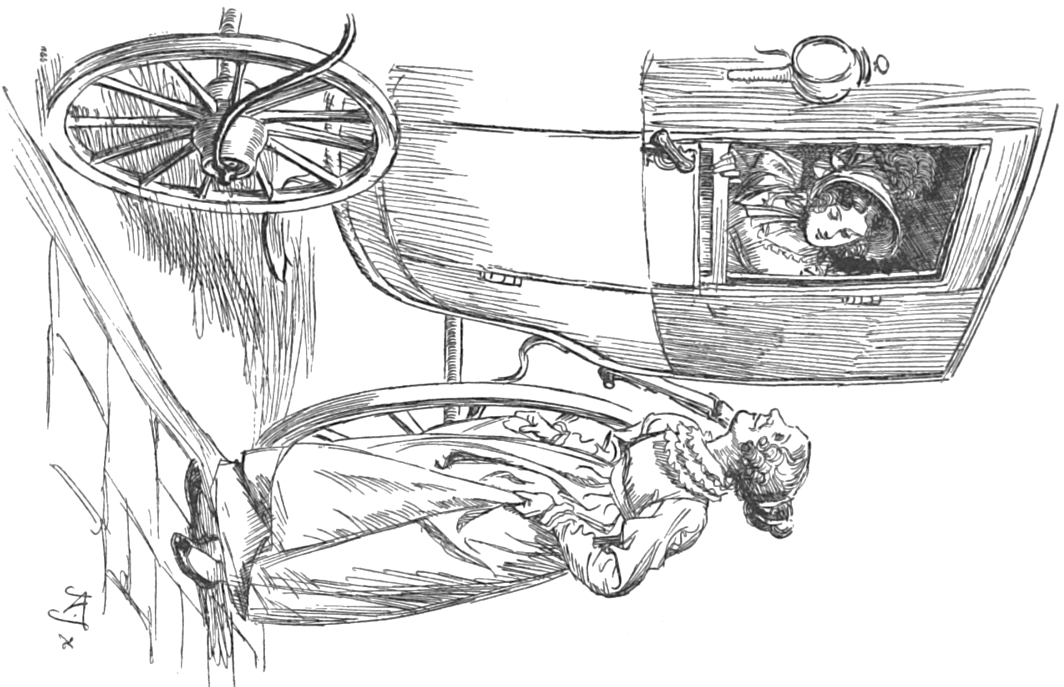
'Aye, I see what you are thinking of, the pianoforte. What is to become of that?—Very true. Poor dear Jane was talking of it just now.—"You must go," said she. "You and I must part. You will have no business here.—Let it stay, however," said she; "give it houserom till Colonel Campbell comes back. I shall talk about it to him; he will settle for me; he will help me out of all my difficulties."—And to this day, I do believe, she knows not whether it was his present or his daughter's.'

Now Emma was obliged to think of the pianoforte; and the remembrance of all her former fanciful and unfair conjectures was so little pleasing, that she soon allowed herself to believe her visit had been long enough; and, with a repetition of every thing that she could venture to say of the good wishes which she really felt, took leave.

going to Mrs Smallridge's at the time proposed. Her health seemed for the moment completely deranged—appetite quite gone—and though there were no absolutely alarming symptoms, nothing touching the pulmonary complaint, which was the standing apprehension of the family, Mr Perry was uneasy about her. He thought she had undertaken more than she was equal to, and that she felt it so herself, though she would not own it. Her spirits seemed overcome. Her present home, he could not but observe, was unfavourable to a nervous disorder:—confined always to one room;—he could have wished it otherwise—and her good aunt, though his very old friend, he must acknowledge to be not the best companion for an invalid of that description. Her care and attention could not be questioned; they were, in fact, only too great. He very much feared that Miss Fairfax derived more evil than good from them. Emma listened with the warmest concern; grieved for her more and more, and looked around eager to discover some way of being useful. To take her—be it only an hour or two—from her aunt, to give her change of air and scene, and quiet rational conversation, even for an hour or two, might do her good; and the following morning she wrote again to say, in the most feeling language she could command, that she would call for her in the carriage at any hour that Jane would name—mentioning that she had Mr Perry's decided opinion, in favour of such exercise for his patient. The answer was only in this short note:

'Miss Fairfax's compliments and thanks, but is quite unequal to any exercise.'

Emma felt that her own note had deserved something better; but it was impossible to quarrel with words, whose tremulous inequality shewed indisposition so plainly, and she thought only of how she might best counteract this unwillingness to be seen or assisted. In spite of the answer, therefore, she ordered the carriage, and drove to Mrs Bates's, in the hope that Jane would be induced to join her—but it would not do;—Miss Bates came to the carriage door, all gratitude, and agreeing with her most earnestly in thinking an airing might be of the greatest service—and every thing that message could do was tried—but all in vain. Miss Bates was obliged to return without success; Jane was quite unpersuadable; the mere proposal of going out seemed to make her worse.—Emma wished she could have seen her, and tried her own powers; but, almost before she



MISS BATES CAME TO THE CARRIAGE DOOR



SEEN THE CROWN CHAISE PASS BY

'Yes, Jane says she is sure they will; but yet, this is such a situation as she cannot feel herself justified in declining. I was so astonished when she first told me what she had been saying to Mrs Elton, and when Mrs Elton at the same moment came congratulating me upon it! It was before tea—stay—no, it could not be before tea, because we were just going to cards—and yet it was before tea, because I remember thinking—Oh! no, now I recollect, now I have it; something happened before tea, but not that. Mr Elton was called out of the room before tea, old John Abdy's son wanted to speak with him. Poor old John, I have a great regard for him; he was clerk to my poor father twenty-seven years; and now, poor old man, he is bed-ridden, and very poorly with the rheumatic gout in his joints—I must go and see him to-day; and so will Jane, I am sure, if she gets out at all. And poor John's son came to talk to Mr Elton about relief from the parish; he is very well to do himself, you know, being head man at the Crown, ostler, and every thing of that sort, but still he cannot keep his father without some help; and so, when Mr Elton came back, he told us what John ostler had been telling him, and then it came out about the chaise having been sent to Randalls to take Mr Frank Churchill to Richmond. That was what happened before tea. It was after tea that Jane spoke to Mrs Elton.'

Miss Bates would hardly give Emma time to say how perfectly new this circumstance was to her; but as without supposing it possible that she could be ignorant of any of the particulars of Mr Frank Churchill's going, she proceeded to give them all, it was of no consequence.

What Mr Elton had learned from the ostler on the subject, being the accumulation of the ostler's own knowledge, and the knowledge of the servants at Randalls, was, that a messenger had come over from Richmond soon after the return of the party from Box Hill—which messenger, however, had been no more than was expected; and that Mr Churchill had sent his nephew a few lines, containing, upon the whole, a tolerable account of Mrs Churchill, and only wishing him not to delay coming back beyond the next morning early; but that Mr Frank Churchill having resolved to go home directly, without waiting at all, and his horse seeming to have got a cold, Tom had been sent off immediately for the Crown chaise, and the ostler had stood out and seen it pass by, the boy going a good pace, and driving very steady.

could hint the wish, Miss Bates made it appear that she had promised her niece on no account to let Miss Woodhouse in. 'Indeed, the truth was, that poor dear Jane could not bear to see any body—any body at all—Mrs Elton, indeed, could not be denied—and Mrs Cole had made such a point—and Mrs Perry had said so much—but, except them, Jane would really see nobody.'

Emma did not want to be classed with the Mrs Eltons, the Mrs Perrys, and the Mrs Coles, who would force themselves anywhere; neither could she feel any right of preference herself—she submitted, therefore, and only questioned Miss Bates farther as to her niece's appetite and diet, which she longed to be able to assist. On that subject poor Miss Bates was very unhappy, and very communicative; Jane would hardly eat any thing:—Mr Perry recommended nourishing food; but every thing they could command (and never had any body such good neighbours) was distasteful.

Emma, on reaching home, called the housekeeper directly, to an examination of her stores; and some arrowroot of very superior quality was speedily despatched to Miss Bates with a most friendly note. In half an hour the arrowroot was returned, with a thousand thanks from Miss Bates, but 'dear Jane would not be satisfied without its being sent back; it was a thing she could not take—and, moreover, she insisted on her saying, that she was not at all in want of any thing.'

When Emma afterwards heard that Jane Fairfax had been seen wandering about the meadows, at some distance from Highbury, on the afternoon of the very day on which she had, under the plea of being unequal to any exercise, so peremptorily refused to go out with her in the carriage, she could have no doubt—putting every thing together—that Jane was resolved to receive no kindness from her. She was sorry, very sorry. Her heart was grieved for a state which seemed but the more pitiable from this sort of irritation of spirits, inconsistency of action, and inequality of powers; and it mortified her that she was given so little credit for proper feeling, or esteemed so little worthy as a friend: but she had the consolation of knowing that her intentions were good, and of being able to say to herself, that could Mr Knightley have been privy to all her attempts of assisting Jane Fairfax, could he even have seen into her heart, he would not, on this occasion, have found any thing to reprove.

house, one must always find agreeable, though every body seemed rather fagged after the morning's party. Even pleasure, you know, is fatiguing—and I cannot say that any of them seemed very much to have enjoyed it. However, I shall always think it a very pleasant party, and feel extremely obliged to the kind friends who included me in it.'

'Miss Fairfax, I suppose, though you were not aware of it, had been making up her mind the whole day?'

'I dare say she had.'

'Whenever the time may come, it must be unwelcome to her and all her friends—but I hope her engagement will have every alleviation that is possible—I mean, as to the character and manners of the family.'

'Thank you, dear Miss Woodhouse. Yes, indeed, there is every thing in the world that can make her happy in it. Except the Sucklings and Bragges, there is not such another nursery establishment, so liberal and elegant, in all Mrs Elton's acquaintance. Mrs Smallridge, a most delightful woman!—A style of living almost equal to Maple Grove—and as to the children, except the little Sucklings and little Bragges, there are not such elegant sweet children anywhere. Jane will be treated with such regard and kindness!—It will be nothing but pleasure, a life of pleasure.—And her salary!—I really cannot venture to name her salary to you, Miss Woodhouse. Even you, used as you are to great sums, would hardly believe that so much could be given to a young person like Jane.'

'Ah! madam,' cried Emma, 'if other children are at all like what I remember to have been myself, I should think five times the amount of what I have ever yet heard named as a salary on such occasions, dearly earned.'

'You are so noble in your ideas!'

'And when is Miss Fairfax to leave you?'

'Very soon, very soon, indeed; that's the worst of it. Within a fortnight. Mrs Smallridge is in a great hurry. My poor mother does not know how to bear it. So then, I try to put it out of her thoughts, and say, Come ma'am, do not let us think about it any more.'

'Her friends must all be sorry to lose her; and will not Colonel and Mrs Campbell be sorry to find that she has engaged herself before their return?'

'To a Mrs Smallridge—charming woman—most superior—to have the charge of her three little girls—delightful children. Impossible that any situation could be more replete with comfort; if we except, perhaps, Mrs Suckling's own family, and Mrs Bragge's; but Mrs Smallridge is intimate with both, and in the very same neighbourhood:—lives only four miles from Maple Grove. Jane will be only four miles from Maple Grove.'

'Mrs Elton, I suppose, has been the person to whom Miss Fairfax owes—'

'Yes, our good Mrs Elton. The most indefatigable, true friend. She would not take a denial. She would not let Jane say, "No," for when Jane first heard of it, (it was the day before yesterday, the very morning we were at Donwell,) when Jane first heard of it, she was quite decided against accepting the offer, and for the reasons you mention; exactly as you say, she had made up her mind to close with nothing till Colonel Campbell's return, and nothing should induce her to enter into any engagement at present—and so she told Mrs Elton over and over again—and I am sure I had no more idea that she would change her mind!—but that good Mrs Elton, whose judgment never fails her, saw farther than I did. It is not every body that would have stood out in such a kind way as she did, and refuse to take Jane's answer; but she positively declared she would not write any such denial yesterday, as Jane wished her; she would wait—and, sure enough, yesterday evening it was all settled that Jane should go. Quite a surprise to me! I had not the least idea!—Jane took Mrs Elton aside, and told her at once, that upon thinking over the advantages of Mrs Smallridge's situation, she had come to the resolution of accepting it.—I did not know a word of it till it was all settled.'

'You spent the evening with Mrs Elton?'

'Yes, all of us; Mrs Elton would have us come. It was settled so, upon the hill, while we were walking about with Mr Knightley. "You must all spend your evening with us," said she—"I positively must have you all come."'

'Mr Knightley was there too, was he?'

'No, not Mr Knightley; he declined it from the first; and though I thought he would come, because Mrs Elton declared she would not let him off, he did not;—but my mother, and Jane, and I, were all there, and a very agreeable evening we had. Such kind friends, you know, Miss Wood-

Chapter XLVI



ONE morning, about ten days after Mrs Churchill's decease, Emma was called downstairs to Mr Weston, who 'could not stay five minutes, and wanted particularly to speak with her.'—He met her at the parlour-door, and hardly asking her how she did, in the natural key of his voice, sunk it immediately, to say, unheard by her father,

'Can you come to Randalls at any time this morning?—Do, if it be possible. Mrs Weston wants to see you. She must see you.'

'Is she unwell?'

'No, no, not at all—only a little agitated. She would have ordered the carriage, and come to you, but she must see you alone, and that you know—(nodding towards her father)—Humph!—Can you come?'

'Certainly. This moment, if you please. It is impossible to refuse what you ask in such a way. But what can be the matter?—Is she really not ill?'

'Depend upon me—but ask no more questions. You will know it all in time. The most unaccountable business! But hush, hush!'

To guess what all this meant, was impossible even for Emma. Something really important seemed announced by his looks; but, as her friend was well, she endeavoured not to be uneasy, and settling it with her father, that she would take her walk now, she and Mr Weston were soon out of the house together and on their way at a quick pace for Randalls.

'Now,'—said Emma, when they were fairly beyond the sweep gates,—now Mr Weston, do let me know what has happened.'

'No, no,'—he gravely replied.—'Don't ask me. I promised my wife to leave it all to her. She will break it to you better than I can. Do not be impatient, Emma; it will all come out too soon.'

'Break it to me,' cried Emma, standing still with terror.—'Good God!—Mr Weston, tell me at once.—Something has happened in Brunswick Square. I know it has. Tell me, I charge you tell me this moment what it is.'

'No, indeed you are mistaken.'—

'Mr Weston do not trifle with me.—Consider how many of my dearest friends are now in Brunswick Square. Which of them is it?—I charge you by all that is sacred, not to attempt concealment.'

'Upon my word, Emma.'—

'Your word!—why not your honour!—why not say upon your honour, that it has nothing to do with any of them? Good Heavens!—What can be to be broke to me, that does not relate to one of that family?'

'Upon my honour,' said he very seriously, 'it does not. It is not in the smallest degree connected with any human being of the name of Knightley.'

Emma's courage returned, and she walked on.

'I was wrong,' he continued, 'in talking of its being broke to you. I should not have used the expression. In fact, it does not concern you—it concerns only myself,—that is, we hope.—Humph!—In short, my dear Emma, there is no occasion to be so uneasy about it. I don't say that it is not a disagreeable business—but things might be much worse.—If we walk fast, we shall soon be at Randalls.'

Emma found that she must wait; and now it required little effort. She asked no more questions therefore, merely employed her own fancy, and that soon pointed out to her the probability of its being some money concern—something just come to light, of a disagreeable nature in the circumstances of the family,—something which the late event at Richmond had brought forward. Her fancy was very active. Half a dozen natural children, perhaps—and poor Frank cut off!—This, though very undesirable, would be no matter of agony to her. It inspired little more than an animating curiosity.

'Who is that gentleman on horseback?' said she, as they proceeded—speaking more to assist Mr Weston in keeping his secret, than with any other view.

'I do not know.—One of the Otways.—Not Frank;—it is not Frank, I assure you. You will not see him. He is half way to Windsor by this time.'

tears)—but, poor dear soul! if you were to see what a headache she has. When one is in great pain, you know one cannot feel any blessing quite as it may deserve. She is as low as possible. To look at her, nobody would think how delighted and happy she is to have secured such a situation. You will excuse her not coming to you—she is not able—she is gone into her own room—I want her to lie down upon the bed. "My dear," said I, "I shall say you are laid down upon the bed;" but, however, she is not; she is walking about the room. But, now that she has written her letters, she says she shall soon be well. She will be extremely sorry to miss seeing you, Miss Woodhouse, but your kindness will excuse her. You were kept waiting at the door—I was quite ashamed—but somehow there was a little bustle—for it so happened that we had not heard the knock, and till you were on the stairs, we did not know any body was coming. "It is only Mrs Cole," said I, "depend upon it. Nobody else would come so early." "Well," said she, "it must be borne some time or other, and it may as well be now." But then Patty came in, and said it was you. "Oh!" said I, "it is Miss Woodhouse: I am sure you will like to see her."—"I can see nobody," said she; and up she got, and would go away; and that was what made us keep you waiting—and extremely sorry and ashamed we were. "If you must go, my dear," said I, "you must, and I will say you are laid down upon the bed."

Emma was most sincerely interested. Her heart had been long growing kinder towards Jane; and this picture of her present sufferings acted as a cure of every former ungenerous suspicion, and left her nothing but pity; and the remembrance of the less just and less gentle sensations of the past, obliged her to admit that Jane might very naturally resolve on seeing Mrs Cole or any other steady friend, when she might not bear to see herself. She spoke as she felt, with earnest regret and solicitude—sincerely wishing that the circumstances which she collected from Miss Bates to be now actually determined on, might be as much for Miss Fairfax's advantage and comfort as possible. 'It must be a severe trial to them all. She had understood it was to be delayed till Colonel Campbell's return.'

'So very kind!' replied Miss Bates. 'But you are always kind.'

There was no bearing such an 'always;' and to break through her dreadful gratitude, Emma made the direct inquiry of—

'Where—may I ask?—is Miss Fairfax going?'

‘The ladies were all at home.’ She had never rejoiced at the sound before, nor ever before entered the passage, nor walked up the stairs, with any wish of giving pleasure, but in conferring obligation, or of deriving it, except in subsequent ridicule.

There was a bustle on her approach; a good deal of moving and talking. She heard Miss Bates’s voice, something was to be done in a hurry; the maid looked frightened and awkward; hoped she would be pleased to wait a moment, and then ushered her in too soon. The aunt and niece seemed both escaping into the adjoining room. Jane she had a distinct glimpse of, looking extremely ill; and, before the door had shut them out, she heard Miss Bates saying, ‘Well, my dear, I shall say you are laid down upon the bed, and I am sure you are ill enough.’

Poor old Mrs Bates, civil and humble as usual, looked as if she did not quite understand what was going on.

‘I am afraid Jane is not very well,’ said she, ‘but I do not know; they tell me she is well. I dare say my daughter will be here presently, Miss Woodhouse. I hope you find a chair. I wish Hetty had not gone. I am very little able—Have you a chair, ma’am? Do you sit where you like? I am sure she will be here presently.’

Emma seriously hoped she would. She had a moment’s fear of Miss Bates keeping away from her. But Miss Bates soon came—‘Very happy and obliged’—but Emma’s conscience told her that there was not the same cheerful volubility as before—less ease of look and manner. A very friendly inquiry after Miss Fairfax, she hoped, might lead the way to a return of old feelings. The touch seemed immediate.

‘Ah! Miss Woodhouse, how kind you are!—I suppose you have heard—and are come to give us joy. This does not seem much like joy, indeed, in me—(twinkling away a tear or two)—but it will be very trying for us to part with her, after having had her so long, and she has a dreadful headache just now, writing all the morning;—such long letters, you know, to be written to Colonel Campbell, and Mrs Dixon. “My dear,” said I, “you will blind yourself”—for tears were in her eyes perpetually. One cannot wonder, one cannot wonder. It is a great change; and though she is amazingly fortunate—such a situation, I suppose, as no young woman before ever met with on first going out—do not think us ungrateful, Miss Woodhouse, for such surprising good fortune—(again dispersing her

‘Has your son been with you, then?’

‘Oh! yes—did not you know?—Well, well, never mind.’

For a moment he was silent; and then added, in a tone much more guarded and demure,

‘Yes, Frank came over this morning, just to ask us how we did.’

They hurried on, and were speedily at Randalls.—‘Well, my dear,’ said he, as they entered the room—‘I have brought her, and now I hope you will soon be better. I shall leave you together. There is no use in delay. I shall not be far off, if you want me.’—And Emma distinctly heard him add, in a lower tone, before he quitted the room,—‘I have been as good as my word. She has not the least idea.’

Mrs Weston was looking so ill, and had an air of so much perturbation, that Emma’s uneasiness increased; and the moment they were alone, she eagerly said,

‘What is it my dear friend? Something of a very unpleasant nature, I find, has occurred;—do let me know directly what it is. I have been walking all this way in complete suspense. We both abhor suspense. Do not let mine continue longer. It will do you good to speak of your distress, whatever it may be.’

‘Have you indeed no idea?’ said Mrs Weston in a trembling voice.

‘Cannot you, my dear Emma—cannot you form a guess as to what you are to hear?’

‘So far as that it relates to Mr Frank Churchill, I do guess.’

‘You are right. It does relate to him, and I will tell you directly;’ (resuming her work, and seeming resolved against looking up.) ‘He has been here this very morning, on a most extraordinary errand. It is impossible to express our surprize. He came to speak to his father on a subject,—to announce an attachment—’

She stopped to breathe. Emma thought first of herself, and then of Harriet.

‘More than an attachment, indeed,’ resumed Mrs Weston; ‘an engagement—a positive engagement.—What will you say, Emma—what will any body say, when it is known that Frank Churchill and Miss Fairfax are engaged;—nay, that they have been long engaged!’

Emma even jumped with surprize;—and, horror-struck, exclaimed, ‘Jane Fairfax!—Good God! You are not serious? You do not mean it?’

'You may well be amazed,' returned Mrs Weston, still averting her eyes, and talking on with eagerness, that Emma might have time to recover—'You may well be amazed. But it is even so. There has been a solemn engagement between them ever since October—formed at Weymouth, and kept a secret from every body. Not a creature knowing it but themselves—neither the Campbells, nor her family, nor his.—It is so wonderful, that though perfectly convinced of the fact, it is yet almost incredible to myself. I can hardly believe it.—I thought I knew him.'

Emma scarcely heard what was said.—Her mind was divided between two ideas—her own former conversations with him about Miss Fairfax; and poor Harriet;—and for some time she could only exclaim, and require confirmation, repeated confirmation.

'Well,' said she at last, trying to recover herself; 'this is a circumstance which I must think of at least half a day, before I can at all comprehend it. What!—engaged to her all the winter—before either of them came to Highbury?'

'Engaged since October,—secretly engaged.—It has hurt me, Emma, very much. It has hurt his father equally. Some part of his conduct we cannot excuse.'

Emma pondered a moment, and then replied, 'I will not pretend not to understand you; and to give you all the relief in my power, be assured that no such effect has followed his attentions to me, as you are apprehensive of.'

Mrs Weston looked up, afraid to believe; but Emma's countenance was as steady as her words.

'That you may have less difficulty in believing this boast, of my present perfect indifference,' she continued, 'I will farther tell you, that there was a period in the early part of our acquaintance, when I did like him, when I was very much disposed to be attached to him—nay, was attached—and how it came to cease, is perhaps the wonder. Fortunately, however, it did cease. I have really for some time past, for at least these three months, cared nothing about him. You may believe me, Mrs Weston. This is the simple truth.'

Mrs Weston kissed her with tears of joy; and when she could find utterance, assured her, that this protestation had done her more good than any thing else in the world could do.

Chapter XLIV

THE wretchedness of a scheme to Box Hill was in Emma's thoughts all the evening. How it might be considered by the rest of the party, she could not tell. They, in their different homes, and their different ways, might be looking back on it with pleasure; but in her view it was a morning more completely misspent, more totally bare of rational satisfaction at the time, and more to be abhorred in recollection, than any she had ever passed. A whole evening of back-gammon with her father, was felicity to it. There, indeed, lay real pleasure, for there she was giving up the sweetest hours of the twenty-four to his comfort; and feeling that, unmerited as might be the degree of his fond affection and confiding esteem, she could not, in her general conduct, be open to any severe reproach. As a daughter, she hoped she was not without a heart. She hoped no one could have said to her, 'How could you be so unfeeling to your father?—I must, I will tell you truths while I can.' Miss Bates should never again—no, never! If attention, in future, could do away the past, she might hope to be forgiven. She had been often remiss, her conscience told her so; remiss, perhaps, more in thought than fact; scornful, ungracious. But it should be so no more. In the warmth of true contrition, she would call upon her the very next morning, and it should be the beginning, on her side, of a regular, equal, kindly intercourse.

She was just as determined when the morrow came, and went early, that nothing might prevent her. It was not unlikely, she thought, that she might see Mr Knightley in her way; or, perhaps, he might come in while she were paying her visit. She had no objection. She would not be ashamed of the appearance of the penitence, so justly and truly hers. Her eyes were towards Donwell as she walked, but she saw him not.