

At this moment Mr Weston appeared at a little distance from the window, evidently on the watch. His wife gave him a look which invited him in; and, while he was coming round, added, 'Now, dearest Emma, let me in treat you to say and look every thing that may set his heart at ease, and incline him to be satisfied with the match. Let us make the best of it—and, indeed, almost every thing may be fairly said in her favour. It is not a connexion to gratify; but if Mr Churchill does not feel that, why should we? and it may be a very fortunate circumstance for him, for Frank, I mean, that he should have attached himself to a girl of such steadiness of character and good judgment as I have always given her credit for—and still am disposed to give her credit for, in spite of this one great deviation from the strict rule of right. And how much may be said in her situation for even that error!'

'Much, indeed!' cried Emma feelingly. 'If a woman can ever be excused for thinking only of herself, it is in a situation like Jane Fairfax's.—Of such, one may almost say, that "the world is not their's, nor the world's law."'

She met Mr Weston on his entrance, with a smiling countenance, exclaiming,

'A very pretty trick you have been playing me, upon my word! This was a device, I suppose, to sport with my curiosity, and exercise my talent of guessing. But you really frightened me. I thought you had lost half your property, at least. And here, instead of its being a matter of condolence, it turns out to be one of congratulation.—I congratulate you, Mr Weston, with all my heart, on the prospect of having one of the most lovely and accomplished young women in England for your daughter.'

A glance or two between him and his wife, convinced him that all was as right as this speech proclaimed; and its happy effect on his spirits was immediate. His air and voice recovered their usual briskness: he shook her heartily and gratefully by the hand, and entered on the subject in a manner to prove, that he now only wanted time and persuasion to think the engagement no very bad thing. His companions suggested only what could palliate imprudence, or smooth objections; and by the time they had talked it all over together, and he had talked it all over again with Emma, in their walk back to Hartfield, he was become perfectly reconciled, and

not far from thinking it the very best thing that Frank could possibly have done.

'Ah!' thought Emma, 'he would have done as much for Harriet.'

'This was settled last night, and Frank was off with the light this morning. He stopped at Highbury, at the Bates's, I fancy, some time—and then came on hither; but was in such a hurry to get back to his uncle, to whom he is just now more necessary than ever, that, as I tell you, he could stay with us but a quarter of an hour.—He was very much agitated—very much, indeed—to a degree that made him appear quite a different creature from any thing I had ever seen him before.—In addition to all the rest, there had been the shock of finding her so very unwell, which he had had no previous suspicion of—and there was every appearance of his having been feeling a great deal.'

'And do you really believe the affair to have been carrying on with such perfect secrecy?—The Campbells, the Dixons, did none of them know of the engagement?'

Emma could not speak the name of Dixon without a little blush.

'None; not one. He positively said that it had been known to no being in the world but their two selves.'

'Well,' said Emma, 'I suppose we shall gradually grow reconciled to the idea, and I wish them very happy. But I shall always think it a very abominable sort of proceeding. What has it been but a system of hypocrisy and deceit,—espionage, and treachery?—To come among us with professions of openness and simplicity; and such a league in secret to judge us all!—Here have we been, the whole winter and spring, completely duped, fancying ourselves all on an equal footing of truth and honour, with two people in the midst of us who may have been carrying round, comparing and sitting in judgment on sentiments and words that were never meant for both to hear.—They must take the consequence, if they have heard each other spoken of in a way not perfectly agreeable!'

'I am quite easy on that head,' replied Mrs Weston. 'I am very sure that I never said any thing of either to the other, which both might not have heard.'

'You are in luck.—Your only blunder was confined to my ear, when you imagined a certain friend of ours in love with the lady.'

'True. But as I have always had a thoroughly good opinion of Miss Fairfax, I never could, under any blunder, have spoken ill of her; and as to speaking ill of him, there I must have been safe.'

'Nay, dear Emma, now I must take his part; for though he has been wrong in this instance, I have known him long enough to answer for his having many, very many, good qualities; and—'

'Good God!' cried Emma, not attending to her.—'Mrs Smallbridge, too! Jane actually on the point of going as governess! What could he mean by such horrible indelicacy? To suffer her to engage herself—to suffer her even to think of such a measure!'

'He knew nothing about it, Emma. On this article I can fully acquit him. It was a private resolution of hers, not communicated to him—or at least not communicated in a way to carry conviction.—Till yesterday, I know he said he was in the dark as to her plans. They burst on him, I do not know how, but by some letter or message—and it was the discovery of what she was doing, of this very project of hers, which determined him to come forward at once, own it all to his uncle, throw himself on his kindness, and, in short, put an end to the miserable state of concealment that had been carrying on so long.'

Emma began to listen better.

'I am to hear from him soon,' continued Mrs Weston. 'He told me at parting, that he should soon write; and he spoke in a manner which seemed to promise me many particulars that could not be given now. Let us wait, therefore, for this letter. It may bring many extenuations. It may make many things intelligible and excusable which now are not to be understood. Don't let us be severe, don't let us be in a hurry to condemn him. Let us have patience. I must love him; and now that I am satisfied on one point, the one material point, I am sincerely anxious for its all turning out well, and ready to hope that it may. They must both have suffered a great deal under such a system of secrecy and concealment.'

'His sufferings,' replied Emma dryly, 'do not appear to have done him much harm. Well, and how did Mr Churchill take it?'

'Most favourably for his nephew—gave his consent with scarcely a difficulty. Conceive what the events of a week have done in that family! While poor Mrs Churchill lived, I suppose there could not have been a hope, a chance, a possibility;—but scarcely are her remains at rest in the family vault, than her husband is persuaded to act exactly opposite to what she would have required. What a blessing it is, when undue influence does not survive the grave!—He gave his consent with very little persuasion.'

## Chapter XLVII



HARRIET, poor Harriet!—Those were the words, in them lay the tormenting ideas which Emma could not get rid of, and which constituted the real misery of the business to her. Frank Churchill had behaved very ill by herself—very ill in many ways,—but it was not so much his behaviour as her own, which made her so angry with him. It was the scrape which he had drawn her into on Harriet's account, that gave the deepest hue to his offence.—Poor Harriet! to be a second time the dupe of her misconceptions and flattery. Mr Knightley had spoken prophetically, when he once said, 'Emma, you have been no friend to Harriet Smith.'—She was afraid she had done her nothing but disservice.—It was true that she had not to charge herself, in this instance as in the former, with being the sole and original author of the mischief; with having suggested such feelings as might otherwise never have entered Harriet's imagination; for Harriet had acknowledged her admiration and preference of Frank Churchill before she had ever given her a hint on the subject; but she felt completely guilty of having encouraged what she might have repressed. She might have prevented the indulgence and increase of such sentiments. Her influence would have been enough. And now she was very conscious that she ought to have prevented them.—She felt that she had been risking her friend's happiness on most insufficient grounds. Common sense would have directed her to tell Harriet, that she must not allow herself to think of him, and that there were five hundred chances to one against his ever caring for her.—'But, with common sense,' she added, 'I am afraid I have had little to do.'

She was extremely angry with herself. If she could not have been angry with Frank Churchill too, it would have been dreadful.—As for Jane Fairfax, she might at least relieve her feelings from any present solicitude on her account. Harriet would be anxiety enough; she need no longer be unhappy about Jane, whose troubles and whose ill-health having, of course, the same origin, must be equally under cure.—Her days of insignificance and evil were over.—She would soon be well, and happy, and prosperous.—Emma could now imagine why her own attentions had been slighted. This discovery laid many smaller matters open. No doubt it had been from jealousy.—In Jane's eyes she had been a rival; and well might any thing she could offer of assistance or regard be repulsed. An airing in the Hartfield carriage would have been the rack, and arrowroot from the Hartfield storeroom must have been poison. She understood it all, and as far as her mind could disengage itself from the injustice and selfishness of angry feelings, she acknowledged that Jane Fairfax would have neither elevation nor happiness beyond her desert. But poor Harriet was such an engrossing charge! There was little sympathy to be spared for any body else. Emma was sadly fearful that this second disappointment would be more severe than the first. Considering the very superior claims of the object, it ought; and judging by its apparently stronger effect on Harriet's mind, producing reserve and self-command, it would.—She must communicate the painful truth, however, and as soon as possible. An injunction of secrecy had been among Mr Weston's parting words. 'For the present, the whole affair was to be completely a secret. Mr Churchill had made a point of it, as a token of respect to the wife he had so very recently lost; and every body admitted it to be no more than due decorum.'—Emma had promised; but still Harriet must be excepted. It was her superior duty.

In spite of her vexation, she could not help feeling it almost ridiculous, that she should have the very same distressing and delicate office to perform by Harriet, which Mrs Weston had just gone through by herself. The intelligence, which had been so anxiously announced to her, she was now to be anxiously announcing to another. Her heart beat quick on hearing Harriet's footstep and voice; so, she supposed, had poor Mrs Weston felt when she was approaching Randalls. Could the event of the

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.

'Mr Weston will be almost as much relieved as myself,' said she. 'On this point we have been wretched. It was our darling wish that you might be attached to each other—and we were persuaded that it was so.—Imagine what we have been feeling on your account.'

'I have escaped; and that I should escape, may be a matter of grateful wonder to you and myself. But this does not acquit him, Mrs Weston; and I must say, that I think him greatly to blame. What right had he to come among us with affection and faith engaged, and with manners so very disengaged? What right had he to endeavour to please, as he certainly did—to distinguish any one young woman with persevering attention, as he certainly did—while he really belonged to another?—How could he tell what mischief he might be doing?—How could he tell that he might not be making me in love with him?—very wrong, very wrong indeed.'

'From something that he said, my dear Emma, I rather imagine—'

'And how could she bear such behaviour! Composure with a witness! to look on, while repeated attentions were offering to another woman, before her face, and not resent it.—That is a degree of placidity, which I can neither comprehend nor respect.'

'There were misunderstandings between them, Emma; he said so expressly. He had not time to enter into much explanation. He was here only a quarter of an hour, and in a state of agitation which did not allow the full use even of the time he could stay—but that there had been misunderstandings he decidedly said. The present crisis, indeed, seemed to be brought on by them; and those misunderstandings might very possibly arise from the impropriety of his conduct.'

'Impropriety! Oh! Mrs Weston—it is too calm a censure. Much, much beyond impropriety!—It has sunk him, I cannot say how it has sunk him in my opinion. So unlike what a man should be!—None of that upright integrity, that strict adherence to truth and principle, that disdain of trick and littleness, which a man should display in every transaction of his life.'

'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 surprise;—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

disclosure bear an equal resemblance!—But of that, unfortunately, there could be no chance.

'Well, Miss Woodhouse!' cried Harriet, coming eagerly into the room—'is not this the oddest news that ever was?'

'What news do you mean?' replied Emma, unable to guess, by look or voice, whether Harriet could indeed have received any hint.

'About Jane Fairfax. Did you ever hear any thing so strange? Oh!—you need not be afraid of owning it to me, for Mr Weston has told me himself. I met him just now. He told me it was to be a great secret; and, therefore, I should not think of mentioning it to any body but you, but he said you knew it.'

'What did Mr Weston tell you?'—said Emma, still perplexed.

'Oh! he told me all about it; that Jane Fairfax and Mr Frank Churchill are to be married, and that they have been privately engaged to one another this long while. How very odd!'

It was, indeed, so odd; Harriet's behaviour was so extremely odd, that Emma did not know how to understand it. Her character appeared absolutely changed. She seemed to propose shewing no agitation, or disappointment, or peculiar concern in the discovery. Emma looked at her, quite unable to speak.

'Had you any idea,' cried Harriet, 'of his being in love with her?—You, perhaps, might.—You (blushing as she spoke) who can see into every body's heart; but nobody else—'

'Upon my word,' said Emma, 'I begin to doubt my having any such talent. Can you seriously ask me, Harriet, whether I imagined him attached to another woman at the very time that I was—tacitly, if not openly—encouraging you to give way to your own feelings?—I never had the slightest suspicion, till within the last hour, of Mr Frank Churchill's having the least regard for Jane Fairfax. You may be very sure that if I had, I should have cautioned you accordingly.'

'Me!' cried Harriet, colouring, and astonished. 'Why should you caution me?—You do not think I care about Mr Frank Churchill?'

'I am delighted to hear you speak so stoutly on the subject,' replied Emma, smiling; 'but you do not mean to deny that there was a time—and not very distant either—when you gave me reason to understand that you did care about him?'

'Him!—never, never. Dear Miss Woodhouse, how could you so mistake me?' turning away distressed.

'Harriet!' cried Emma, after a moment's pause—'What do you mean?—Good Heaven! what do you mean?—Mistake you!—Am I to suppose then?—'

She could not speak another word.—Her voice was lost; and she sat down, waiting in great terror till Harriet should answer.

Harriet, who was standing at some distance, and with face turned from her, did not immediately say any thing; and when she did speak, it was in a voice nearly as agitated as Emma's.

'I should not have thought it possible,' she began, 'that you could have misunderstood me! I know we agreed never to name him—but considering how infinitely superior he is to every body else, I should not have thought it possible that I could be supposed to mean any other person. Mr Frank Churchill, indeed! I do not know who would ever look at him in the company of the other. I hope I have a better taste than to think of Mr Frank Churchill, who is like nobody by his side. And that you should have been so mistaken, is amazing!—I am sure, but for believing that you entirely approved and meant to encourage me in my attachment, I should have considered it at first too great a presumption almost, to dare to think of him. At first, if you had not told me that more wonderful things had happened; that there had been matches of greater disparity (those were your very words);—I should not have dared to give way to—I should not have thought it possible—But if you, who had been always acquainted with him—'

'Harriet!' cried Emma, collecting herself resolutely—'Let us understand each other now, without the possibility of farther mistake. Are you speaking of—Mr Knightley?'

'To be sure I am. I never could have an idea of any body else—and so I thought you knew. When we talked about him, it was as clear as possible.'

'Not quite,' returned Emma, with forced calmness, 'for all that you then said, appeared to me to relate to a different person. I could almost assert that you had named Mr Frank Churchill. I am sure the service Mr Frank Churchill had rendered you, in protecting you from the gipsies, was spoken of.'

'Oh! Miss Woodhouse, how you do forget!'

'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 Orways.—Not Frank;—it is not Frank, I assure you. You will not see him. He is half way to Windsor by this time.'

'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.

'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.

'My dear Harriet, I perfectly remember the substance of what I said on the occasion. I told you that I did not wonder at your attachment; that considering the service he had rendered you, it was extremely natural:—and you agreed to it, expressing yourself very warmly as to your sense of that service, and mentioning even what your sensations had been in seeing him come forward to your rescue.—The impression of it is strong on my memory.'

'Oh, dear,' cried Harriet, 'now I recollect what you mean; but I was thinking of something very different at the time. It was not the gipsies—it was not Mr Frank Churchill that I meant. No! (with some elevation) I was thinking of a much more precious circumstance—of Mr Knightley's coming and asking me to dance, when Mr Elton would not stand up with me; and when there was no other partner in the room. That was the kind action; that was the noble benevolence and generosity; that was the service which made me begin to feel how superior he was to every other being upon earth.'

'Good God!' cried Emma, 'this has been a most unfortunate—most deplorable mistake!—What is to be done?'

'You would not have encouraged me, then, if you had understood me? At least, however, I cannot be worse off than I should have been, if the other had been the person; and now—it is possible—'

She paused a few moments. Emma could not speak.

'I do not wonder, Miss Woodhouse,' she resumed, 'that you should feel a great difference between the two, as to me or as to any body. You must think one five hundred million times more above me than the other. But I hope, Miss Woodhouse, that supposing—that if—strange as it may appear.—But you know they were your own words, that more wonderful things had happened, matches of greater disparity had taken place than between Mr Frank Churchill and me; and, therefore, it seems as if such a thing even as this, may have occurred before—and if I should be so fortunate, beyond expression, as to—if Mr Knightley should really—if he does not mind the disparity, I hope, dear Miss Woodhouse, you will not set yourself against it, and try to put difficulties in the way. But you are too good for that, I am sure.'

Harriet was standing at one of the windows. Emma turned round to look at her in consternation, and hastily said,

‘Have you any idea of Mr Knightley’s returning your affection?’

‘Yes,’ replied Harriet modestly, but not fearfully—‘I must say that I have.’

Emma’s eyes were instantly withdrawn; and she sat silently meditating, in a fixed attitude, for a few minutes. A few minutes were sufficient for making her acquainted with her own heart. A mind like hers, once opening to suspicion, made rapid progress. She touched—she admitted—she acknowledged the whole truth. Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr Knightley, than with Frank Churchill? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet’s having some hope of a return? It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr Knightley must marry no one but herself!

Her own conduct, as well as her own heart, was before her in the same few minutes. She saw it all with a clearness which had never blessed her before. How improperly had she been acting by Harriet! How inconsiderate, how indelicate, how irrational, how unfeeling had been her conduct! What blindness, what madness, had led her on! It struck her with dreadful force, and she was ready to give it every bad name in the world. Some portion of respect for herself, however, in spite of all these demerits—some concern for her own appearance, and a strong sense of justice by Harriet—(there would be no need of compassion to the girl who believed herself loved by Mr Knightley—but justice required that she should not be made unhappy by any coldness now,) gave Emma the resolution to sit and endure farther with calmness, with even apparent kindness.—For her own advantage indeed, it was fit that the utmost extent of Harriet’s hopes should be enquired into; and Harriet had done nothing to forfeit the regard and interest which had been so voluntarily formed and maintained—or to deserve to be slighted by the person, whose counsels had never led her right.—Rousing from reflection, therefore, and subduing her emotion, she turned to Harriet again, and, in a more inviting accent, renewed the conversation; for as to the subject which had first introduced it, the wonderful story of Jane Fairfax, that was quite sunk and lost.—Neither of them thought but of Mr Knightley and themselves.

Harriet, who had been standing in no unhappy reverie, was yet very glad to be called from it; by the now encouraging manner of such a judge, and such a friend as Miss Woodhouse, and only wanted invitation, to give

## 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.’