**21:20**

**Mr. Knightley:** Very well, I admit it. You have improved Harriet Smith.

**Emma:** I hope you're not the only man to have noticed.

**Mr. Knightley:** I'm not. I believe your friend will soon hear something serious. Something to her advantage.

**Emma:** Who makes you his confidant?

**Mr. Knightley:** I have reason to believe Harriet Smith will soon receive an offer of marriage from a man desperately in love with her, Robert Martin. He came here two evenings ago to consult about it. He's a tenant, you know, and a good

friend. He asked whether it would be imprudent of him to settle too early,

whether she was too young, or whether he was beneath her.

**Emma:** Better questions for Mr. Martin, I could not have chosen myself.

**Mr. Knightley:** I never hear better sense from anyone than from Robert Martin. He proved he could afford to marry, and I say he could not do better.

**Emma:** No indeed, he could not. Come, I will tell you something in return. He

wrote to Harriet yesterday.

**Mr. Knightley:** Oh, yes?

**Emma:** Yes. He was refused.

**Mr. Knightley:** I'm not sure I understand.

**Emma:** He asked, and she refused.

**Mr. Knightley:** Then she is a greater simpleton than I believed.

**Emma:** The most incomprehensible thing in the world to a man is a woman who rejects his offer of marriage.

**Mr. Knightley:** I do not comprehend it because it is madness. I hope you are wrong.

**Emma:** I could not be. I saw her answer.

**Mr. Knightley:** You saw her answer. Emma, you wrote her answer, didn't you?

**Emma:** If I did, then I would have done no wrong. He is not Harriet's equal.

**Mr. Knightley:** I agree, he is not her equal.

**Emma:** Good.

**Mr. Knightley:** He is her superior in sense and situation. What are Harriet Smith's claims of birth or education that make her higher than Robert Martin? She is the natural daughter of nobody-knows-whom. The advantage of the match was entirely on her side.

**Emma:** What! A farmer? Even with all his merit and match for my dear friend, it would be a degradation for her to marry a person whom I could not even

admit as my own acquaintance!

**Mr. Knightley:** A degradation for illegitimacy and ignorance to marry to a respected, intelligent farmer?

**Emma:** She is a gentleman's daughter.

**Mr. Knightley:** Whoever her parents, they made no plans to introduce her into good society. She was left with Mrs. Goddard for an indifferent education. Her friends evidently thought this was good enough for her, and it was, and she thought so too, until you began to puff her up! Vanity working on a weak mind

produces every kind of mischief.

**Emma:** Hmm, you dismiss her beauty and good nature, yet I would be very much mistaken if your sex in general does not think those claims the highest a

woman could possess.

**Mr. Knightley:** Men of sense, whatever you may say, do not want silly wives! Upon my word, Emma. Better be without sense than misapply it as you do.

**Emma:** We see so differently on this point that there can be no use canvassing it and we shall only make each other angry. Ah! I see the tea is ready. Let's stop and have some.