

AUDITION PIECE 4

Scene 14: A party – and a pianoforté

The Coles' house. Evening.

Emma: Why do you smile?

Frank Churchill: Nay, why do you?

Emma: Me! I suppose I smile for pleasure at Colonel Campbell's being so rich and so liberal. A pianoforté is a handsome present.

Frank Churchill: Very.

Emma: I rather wonder that it was never made before.

Frank Churchill: Perhaps Miss Fairfax has never been staying here so long before.

Emma: Or that he did not give her the use of their own instrument – which must now be shut up in London, untouched by anybody.

Frank Churchill: That is a grand pianoforté, and he might think it too large for Mrs Bates' house.

Emma: You may say what you choose – but your countenance testifies that your thoughts on this subject are very much like mine.

Frank Churchill: I rather believe you are giving me more credit for acuteness than I deserve. I smile because you smile, and shall probably suspect whatever I find you suspect; but at present I do not see what there is to question. If Colonel Campbell is not the giver, who can be?

Emma: What do you say to Mrs Dixon?

Frank Churchill: Mrs Dixon! I had not thought of Mrs Dixon. She must know as well as her father, how acceptable an instrument would be; and perhaps the mode of it, the mystery, the surprise, is more like a young woman's scheme than an elderly man's.

Emma: If so, you must extend your suspicions and comprehend Mr Dixon in them.

Frank Churchill: Mr Dixon! Very well. Yes, I immediately perceive that it must be the joint present of Mr and Mrs Dixon. We were speaking the other day, you know, of his being so warm an admirer of her performance.

Emma: I cannot help suspecting either that, after making his proposals to her friend, Mr Dixon had the misfortune to fall in love with Miss Fairfax, or that he became conscious of a little attachment on her side. I am sure there must be a particular cause for her choosing to come to Highbury instead of going with the Campbells to Ireland...And then, he saved her life. Did you ever hear of that? A water-party; and by some accident she was falling overboard. He caught her.

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Frank Churchill: He did. I was there – one of the party.

Mrs Weston approaches Emma and draws her aside.

Mrs Weston: My dear Emma, I am longing to talk to you. I have been making discoveries and forming plans, just like yourself. Do you know how Miss Bates and her niece came here? The manner of their coming, I mean?

Emma: They walked, I conclude. How else could they come?

Mrs Weston: It occurred to me how sad it would be to have Jane Fairfax walking home again, late at night, in the cold, so I assured Miss Bates that our carriage would be at her service before it took us home. She was as grateful as possible, but told me that Mr Knightley's carriage had brought and was to take them home again. Such a very kind, thoughtful attention! The sort of thing that so few men would think of.

Emma: I know no man more likely than Mr Knightley to do the sort of thing – to do anything really good-natured, useful, considerate, or benevolent.

Mrs Weston: While Miss Bates was speaking, a suspicion darted into my head. The more I think of it, the more probable it appears. I have made a match between Mr Knightley and Jane Fairfax. See the consequence of keeping you company! What do you say to it?

Emma: (*in astonishment*) Mr Knightley and Jane Fairfax! Dear Mrs Weston, how could you think of such a thing? Mr Knightley! Mr Knightley must not marry! You would not have little Henry cut out from Donwell? I am amazed that you should think of such a thing.

Mrs Weston: My dear Emma, I do not want the match – but the idea has been given me by circumstances; and if Mr Knightley really wished to marry, you would not have him refrain on Henry's account, a boy of six-years-old, who knows nothing of the matter?

Emma: Yes, I would. I could not bear to have Henry supplanted. Mr Knightley marry! No, I have never had such an idea, and I cannot adopt it now. And Jane Fairfax, too, of all women!

Mrs Weston: Nay, she has always been a first favourite with him, as you very well know.

Emma: But the imprudence of such a match!

Mrs Weston: I am not speaking of its prudence; merely its probability.

Emma: I see no probability in it. His good nature, his humanity, would be quite enough to account for the carriage. He has a great regard for the Bates', independent of Jane Fairfax. My dear Mrs Weston, do not take to match-making. You do it very ill.

Mrs Weston: This pianoforté that has been sent her – may it not be from Mr Knightley? He is such an admirer of her performance on the pianoforté, and of her voice! I have heard him say that he could listen to her for ever.

Emma: I do not think it is at all a likely thing for him to do. Mr Knightley does nothing mysteriously.