

AUDITION PIECE 5

Act Two

Scene 1: Arrival of Mrs Elton

Hartfield.

Mrs Elton: Such a charming room, Miss Woodhouse! So extremely like Maple Grove! And the grounds, too, as far as I could observe, are strikingly like. The laurels at Maple Grove are in the same profusion as here, and stand very much in the same way. My brother and sister will be enchanted with this place. People who have extensive grounds themselves are always pleased with anything in the same style.

Emma: When you have seen more of this country, I am afraid you will think you have overrated Hartfield. Surrey is full of beauties.

Mrs Elton: Oh! Yes, I am quite aware of that. It is the garden of England, you know.

Emma: Yes; but we must not rest our claims on that distinction. Many counties, I believe, are called the garden of England, as well as Surrey.

Mrs Elton: No, I fancy not (*with a satisfied smile*). I never heard any county but Surrey called so.

Emma is silenced.

Mrs Elton: My brother and sister have promised us a visit in the spring, or summer at farthest, and that will be our time for exploring. While they are with us, we shall explore a great deal, I daresay. They will have their barouche-landau, of course, which holds four perfectly; and therefore, without saying anything of our carriage, we should be able to explore the different beauties extremely well.

Mrs Elton takes a sip of her tea.

Emma: (*taking the opportunity to change the subject*) I do not ask whether you are musical, Mrs Elton. Upon these occasions, a lady's character generally precedes her; and Highbury has long known that you are a superior performer.

Mrs Elton: A superior performer! Very far from it, I assure you. Consider from how partial a quarter your information came. But I assure you, Miss Woodhouse, it has been the greatest satisfaction, comfort, and delight to me, to hear what a musical society I am got into. I absolutely cannot do without music. I honestly said as much to Mr E. when he was speaking of my future home, and expressing his fears lest the retirement of it should be disagreeable; and the inferiority of the house too. I honestly said that the *world* I could give up – parties, balls, plays – for I had no fear of retirement. Blessed with so many resources within myself, the world was not necessary to me. To those who had no resources it was a different thing; but my resources made me quite independent. Certainly, I had been accustomed to every luxury at Maple Grove; but I did assure him that two carriages were not necessary to my happiness, nor were spacious apartments. 'But,' said I, 'I do not think I can live without something of a musical society. I condition for nothing else; but without music, life would be a blank for me.'

AUDITION PIECE 5

Emma: We cannot suppose (*smiling*) that Mr Elton would hesitate to assure you of there being a very musical society in Highbury; and I hope you will not find he has outstepped the truth more than may be pardoned, in consideration of the motive.

Mrs Elton: No, indeed, I have no doubts at all on that head. I think, Miss Woodhouse, you and I must establish a musical club. Something of that nature would be particularly desirable for me, as an inducement to keep me in practice; for married women, you know, are but too apt to give up music.

Emma: But you, who are so extremely fond of it – there can be no danger, surely.

Mrs Elton: I should hope not; but really, I begin to comprehend that a married woman has many things to call her attention. I believe I was half an hour this morning shut up with my housekeeper.

Emma: But everything of that kind will soon be in so regular a train –

Mrs Elton: Well, we shall see. (*Pause*) We have been calling at Randalls, you know, and found them both at home; and very pleasant people they seem to be. Mr Weston seems an excellent creature – and she appears so truly good – there is something so motherly and kind-hearted about her. She was your governess, I think? Having understood as much, I was rather astonished to find her so very lady-like! But she is really quite the gentlewoman.

Emma: (*offended*) Mrs Weston's manners were always particularly good. Their propriety, simplicity, and elegance would make them the safest model for any young woman.

Mrs Elton: And who do you think came in while we were there? (*Pause*) Knightley! Knightley himself! Not being within when he called the other day, I had never seen him before; and of course, as so particular a friend of Mr E.'s, I had a great curiosity. 'My friend Knightley' has been so often mentioned, that I was really impatient to see him; and I must do my caro sposo the justice to say that he need not be ashamed of his friend. Knightley is quite the gentleman.

Emma and Mrs Elton curtsey; Mrs Elton exits.

Emma: Insufferable woman! Absolutely insufferable! Knightley! Never seen him in her life before, and calls him Knightley! And discovers that he is a gentleman! A little upstart, vulgar being, with her Mr E., and her caro sposo, and her resources, and all her airs of pert pretension and under-bred finery. And Mrs Weston! Astonished that the person who had brought me up should be a gentlewoman! Harriet is disgraced by any comparison. Oh! What would Frank Churchill say to her, if he were here?