

AUDITION PIECE 7, **Scene 5: Box Hill part 1.** *It's hot and the party has eaten. The atmosphere is one of mild irritability.*

Frank Churchill: *(To Emma)* Our companions are excessively stupid. What shall we do to rouse them? *(Raising his voice)* Ladies and gentlemen, I am ordered by Miss Woodhouse (who, wherever she is, presides) to say that she desires to know what you are all thinking of.

Mr Knightley: Is Miss Woodhouse sure that she would like to hear what we are all thinking of?

Emma: Oh, no! *(Laughing)* Upon no account in the world. Let me hear anything rather than what you are all thinking of.

Mrs Elton: It is a sort of thing which I should not have thought myself privileged to inquire into. Though, perhaps, as the Chaperone of the party – I never was in any circle *(muttering to her husband)* – exploring parties – young ladies – married women –

Mr Elton: Very true, my love, very true. Exactly so, indeed – quite unheard of – but some ladies say anything. Better pass it off as a joke. Everybody knows what is due to you.

Frank Churchill: Ladies and gentlemen, I am ordered by Miss Woodhouse to say that she waives her right of knowing exactly what you may all be thinking of. She only demands from each of you either one thing very clever, be it prose or verse, original or repeated – or two things moderately clever – or three things very dull indeed, and she engages to laugh heartily at them all.

Miss Bates: Oh! Very well, then, I need not be uneasy. 'Three things very dull indeed.' That will just do for me, you know. I shall be sure to say three dull things as soon as ever I open my mouth, shan't I? *(Looking round with the most good-humoured dependence on everybody's assent)* Do not you all think I shall?

Emma: Ah! Ma'am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me, but you will be limited as to number – only three at once.

Miss Bates: *(the meaning of Emma's words slowly dawning on her)* Ah! Well – to be sure. Yes, I see what she means, and I will try to hold my tongue. I must make myself very disagreeable, or she would not have said such a thing to an old friend.

Mr Weston: I am making a conundrum. How will a conundrum reckon?

Frank Churchill: Low, I am afraid, sir, very low, but we shall be indulgent, especially to anyone who leads the way.

Emma: No, no, it will not reckon low. A conundrum of Mr Weston's shall clear him and his next neighbour. Come, sir, pray let me hear it.

Mr Weston: I doubt it's being very clever myself. It is too much a matter of fact, but here it is. What two letters of the alphabet are there, that express perfection?

Emma: What two letters! Express perfection! I am sure I do not know.

Mr Weston: Ah! You will never guess. *(To Emma)* You, I am certain, will never guess. I will tell you. M. and A. Em-ma. Do you understand?

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Mr Knightley: This explains the sort of clever thing that is wanted, and Mr Weston has done very well for himself; but he must have knocked up everybody else. Perfection should not have come quite so soon.

Mrs Elton: For myself, I protest I must be excused. I really cannot attempt – I am not at all fond of the sort of thing. I have a great deal of vivacity in my own way, but I really must be allowed to judge when to speak and when to hold my tongue. Pass us, if you please, Mr Churchill.

Mr Elton: Yes, yes, pray pass me. I have nothing to say that can entertain Miss Woodhouse, or any other young lady. An old married man – quite good for nothing. Shall we walk, Augusta?

Mrs Elton: With all my heart. I am really tired of exploring so long on one spot. Come, Jane, take my other arm.

Jane Fairfax: I will stay with my aunt.

Exit Mr and Mrs Elton.

Frank Churchill: Happy couple! How well they suit one another! Very lucky – marrying as they did, upon an acquaintance formed only in a public place! Peculiarly lucky! For as to any real knowledge of a person's disposition that Bath, or any public place, can give – it is all nothing; there can be no knowledge. How many a man has committed himself on a short acquaintance, and rued it all the rest of his life!

Jane Fairfax: Such things do occur, undoubtedly... *(trailing off)*

Frank Churchill: *(gravely)* You were speaking.

Jane Fairfax: A hasty and imprudent attachment may arise – but there is generally time to recover from it afterwards. I believe it can be only weak, irresolute characters (whose happiness must be always at the mercy of chance) who will suffer an unfortunate acquaintance to be an inconvenience, an oppression for ever.

Frank Churchill: *(with renewed liveliness)* Well, I have so little confidence in my own judgment, that whenever I marry, I hope somebody will choose my wife for me. *(Turning to Emma)* Will you? Will you choose a wife for me? I am sure I should like anybody fixed on by you.

Emma: Very well. I undertake the commission. You shall have a charming wife.

Jane Fairfax: *(to Miss Bates)* Now, ma'am, shall we join Mrs Elton?

Miss Bates: If you please, my dear. With all my heart. I am quite ready.

Mr Knightley: I will join you, if I may.

Harriet Smith: *(scrambling to her feet)* And I.