

Emma

by *Jane Austen*

Adapted for the stage by Tim Luscombe

Draft One

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tim@timluscombe.com

Representation:

agents@theproductionexchange.com

+44 (0)203 290 0204

10 page excerpt

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Scene Two.

Hartfield House.

A piano, a fireplace and a table laid for backgammon. A clock ticks.

Bored, Emma rolls the dice and moves her counters.

Emma: *(Gently prodding her father)* It's your move, Papa.

Woodhouse: Mrs Goddard likes piquet. *(Suddenly awake)* What's that?

Emma: *(Patiently)* Your move.

Mr Woodhouse rolls his dice.

Woodhouse: Poor Miss Taylor. I wish she were here.

Emma: But you wouldn't expect her to live with us forever when she might have a house of her own, would you?

Woodhouse: Well, where's the advantage to her in that? Hartfield's three times as large as Mr Weston's house.

Emma: How often we'll be going to see them, though, and they coming here.

Woodhouse: But even if Miss Taylor comes regularly, she'll always be obliged to go away again.

Emma: Well, we must pay our wedding visit very soon.

Woodhouse: How am I to get so far?

Emma: It's only half a mile away, Papa.

Woodhouse: Walk half a mile? I couldn't.

Mr Knightley enters.

Emma: (*Pleased*) Mr Knightley!

Woodhouse: I'm gratified to see you, my dear sir. I've got one or two letters I hope you won't mind looking over for me. Emma...?

Emma fetches her father's letters.

(*continued*) I'm afraid you must have had a shocking walk.

Knightley: Not a speck on my shoes, sir. It's a beautiful summer night.

Woodhouse: We had a vast deal of rain earlier. I wanted them to put off the wedding.

Knightley: I've not wished you joy, being pretty well aware what sort of joy you must both be feeling.

Woodhouse: Poor Miss Taylor's done a sad thing.

Knightley: How did you all behave? Who cried most?

Emma: (*Bringing letters*) We all behaved charmingly. Everybody in their best looks, not a tear, and hardly a long face to be seen.

Knightley: And what of Mr Weston's son? Did Mr Churchill make an appearance?

Emma: No, apparently some odd humour of his aunt prevented him.

Knightley: Had Mrs Weston been a person of consequence, he would've come, I dare say.

Emma: Oh you turn everything to evil. What's Frank Churchill done that you invariably take the opportunity to speak ill of him?

Knightley: I'm as ready to acknowledge Mr Churchill's merits as any other man, but I hear of none, except that he's well grown and good-looking with smooth manners.

Woodhouse: Dear Emma bears everything so bravely, Mr Knightley, but she's really very sorry to lose her governess. I'm sure she'll miss poor Miss Taylor more than she thinks.

Emma: But you've forgotten one matter of joy to me, Papa – that I made the match myself. And to have it take place, when so many people said Mr Weston would never marry again, may comfort me for anything.

Woodhouse: Oh I wish you wouldn't make matches, Emma. They're such silly things, and break up one's family circle grievously. Pray don't make any more.

Emma: But it's the greatest amusement in the world, and you can't think I'll leave off after such success.

Knightley: Success? You made a lucky guess.

Emma: If I hadn't given encouragement and smoothed matters, it might not have come to anything.

Knightley: Really, you're more likely to have done harm than good by interference.

Emma: Well, I must make just one more – for Mr Elton. I thought, when he was joining their hands in church today, he looked so very much as if he would like to have someone do the same for him.

Knightley: Emma, a career as an imaginist hardly becomes your situation. Your leisure and your powers would be a great deal better employed in other ways. Attending to the sick and the poor of the parish, for instance. Your ability to enter into their troubles with a ready sympathy, and give assistance with as much intelligence as goodwill, is a truly worthwhile talent. However, if you must show Mr Elton attention, invite him to dinner. Leave him to choose his own wife. Depend upon it, a handsome young vicar of twenty-seven can take care of himself.

Harriet Smith enters.

Scene Three.

Harriet and Emma have been inspecting Emma's drawings.

Harriet: And though the Martins have no indoors man, Miss Woodhouse, they don't want for anything.

Emma: The Martins rent their farm from Mr Knightley's estate?

Harriet: Yes, they work his farm and live there very comfortably with a fine flock of geese and eight cows – one of them a little Welsh cow, a very pretty little Welsh cow indeed. Mrs Martin said it should be called my cow as I was so very attached to it. And one day, Mr Robert Martin went three miles round in order to bring me some walnuts, just because I'd said how fond of them I was.

Emma: And Mr Martin's wife?

Harriet: Oh no, Mr Martin's a single man. Did you never see him? He rides through Epsom every week on his way to Kingston. He knows you very well by sight.

Emma: I may have seen him fifty times, but a young farmer's the very last sort of person to raise my curiosity. I've taken up a wrong idea, Harriet. These friends may be good sort of people, but they're unfit to be the intimates of a schoolgirl who only wants a little more knowledge to be quite perfect. Just think, when he's old, Mr Martin might be completely gross and vulgar, totally inattentive to appearances and thinking of nothing but profit and loss.

Harriet: Might he? Oh that'll be very bad.

Emma: But what say you to Mr Elton?

Harriet: Mr Elton?

Emma: Is he not good-looking and cheerful? Didn't I tell you what he said of you the other day?

Harriet: No. What?

Emma: He talked of your grace, and said he esteemed you a beautiful creature.

Harriet: (*Blushing and smiling*) I've always thought Mr Elton very agreeable.

Emma: And he could do a great deal more for you than ride around the country getting walnuts.

Harriet: But mightn't his family object to my doubtful birth? After all, I don't know who my parents were.

Emma: But why don't you know, Harriet?

Harriet: No one knows, not even Mrs Goddard or anyone.

Emma: I can't believe I shouldn't have discovered the truth in your situation. You must learn to have more penetration, and not be satisfied to believe just what your teachers choose to tell you.

Harriet: I've not been as lucky as you, Miss Woodhouse. You have a father, and (*picking up a drawing*) a sister. Your drawings are so skilful.

Emma: I own it really is quite Isabella's own little elegant figure, and the face isn't unlike.

Harriet: Miss Woodhouse, why don't *you* marry Mr Elton?

Emma: Oh no, I've very little intention of ever marrying anybody.

Harriet: But you're so charming.

Emma: My being charming isn't quite enough to induce me to marry. I must find other people charming to be tempted. It's not within me to fall in love, and, without love, I'd be a fool to change my situation.

Harriet: Dear me, it's so odd to hear a woman talk so.

Emma: Few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house as I am of Hartfield. And I could never expect to be so always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's.

Harriet: But then to be a poor old maid at last like Miss Bates would be so dreadful.

Mr Elton enters.

Elton: I'm very glad to find you at home, Miss Woodhouse.

Emma: Good day, Mr Elton, how kind of you to call.

Elton: I see I'm interrupting an art class. Miss Smith will receive instruction from each drawing, for there's merit in the least of them. Did you ever have your likeness taken, Miss Smith?

Harriet: Oh dear no, never.

Emma: What an exquisite possession a good picture of you would be. I could almost venture to attempt it myself if Miss Smith would sit. But I'm afraid she won't like to. She thinks so little of her own beauty.

Harriet: Oh no I'd be happy to.

Emma: Then be so good as to fetch my parasol and shawl. I'll draw you out of doors.

Harriet exits while Emma sets a chair and prepares her equipment.

(continued) I might even attempt a tree.

Elton: Miss Smith isn't quite the superior woman Miss Taylor was, but it's clear you do her a very great deal of good in being her friend.

Emma: She possesses all the natural graces in herself. I'm attempting to give her a little more decision of character.

Elton: Skilful is the hand.

Emma: Great is the pleasure.

Harriet returns with props.

Elton: Might I be permitted to attend the drawing?

Emma: (*Giving Harriet an encouraging look*) We'd be most happy to consider you one of the party.

Emma begins to sketch, while Mr Elton hovers at her shoulder.

Harriet: Do you know any riddles, Mr Elton? I'm transcribing riddles into a book – and puzzles and conundrums and enigmas.

Elton: What a delightful project.

Emma: Remain still, if you please, Harriet.

Elton: I don't believe I know any by heart.

Emma: Won't you write one for us?

Elton: Oh I'm quite the stupidest fellow for that kind of thing. Not even Miss Woodhouse – or Miss Smith – could inspire me.

Emma: (*To Mr Elton*) I can do nothing if you fidget by my side and watch every touch.

Elton: But really, it's very hard to know how to avert one's eyes from such excellence. When it's done, Miss Woodhouse, perhaps I might be permitted to take it to town and have it framed? I'd be so very gratified, if you'd trust me with such a precious deposit.

Emma: Very well then. When I've done with her, you shall take charge of Miss Smith.

Jane Fairfax enters in a state of high agitation.

Scene Four.

Weymouth.

Frank runs on.

Frank: My own dear love, in that damned boat this afternoon, I suddenly saw what I'd be without you. The moment Dixon pulled you from the waves to safety, I knew it. If you'd drowned, I'd be as good as dead myself. If we love each other, Jane, what need we care about others? Damn everything else.

Jane: We must care, Frank – you and I especially must care what others think. With only the Campbells' protection to depend on, how can I collude with you against them and hope to prosper? And despite all your connection and fortune, you've no freedom.

Frank: If I ask my aunt now, she'll require me to sacrifice you, I'm certain of it.

Jane: Is she so completely unreasonable? But what about your uncle?

Frank: Oh he's governed entirely by her caprices and her damned temper. She's no more heart than a stone. Her pride and arrogance would revolt. A match with you would be an insult to the great name of Churchill. But, have patience, Jane, and let me judge when best to start the campaign.

Jane: But a secret engagement, Frank? It defies everything I know to be right.

Frank: Then stoop low, Jane, let your affection overcome your judgement, and, knowing it's wrong, say you'll be mine. Promise to be faithful. Promise you'll write –

Jane: But the summer's at an end. We leave Weymouth tomorrow. We might never meet again, let alone wed. If something's said to betray us – a suspicion arises, a letter's intercepted – what peril lies in discovery.

Frank: We'll meet. We'll meet in Epsom.

Jane: In Epsom?

Frank: Not the most celebrated rendezvous for romance, I admit, but ideal for concealment. By birth we both belong there.

Jane: We do?

Frank: Yes! You told me it's where your old aunt resides – the one who took you in when you were orphaned – before the Campbells offered you a better home. Well, my father lives there too!

Jane: Your father?

Frank: Yes! Fate demands we be reunited.

Jane: But I thought you said you were an orphan too.

Frank: My mother died in childbirth. My father was poor at the time and unable to look after me, so I was sent to Yorkshire to live with the Churchills. They were my mother's wealthy relatives and I took their name. Well, I hear my old Papa's recently remarried – a local governess, a Miss Taylor or some such – and I must do right by him and pay a visit to meet them. And you must devise your excuse. Invent a persistent cold for instance. Claim dependence for a few months spent in your native air for the recovery of your health. Just think, what joy for that excellent old aunt to see you again!

Jane: So that I can connive against her, while you and I must pretend to be strangers with no licence to address each other openly –

Frank: We must hope, Jane. We must look forward – to chance, to circumstance, to anything, to everything!

Harriet Smith runs on with a letter.

Scene Five.

Hartfield – the grounds.

Harriet: Something extraordinary has happened, Miss Woodhouse! Will you read it? (*Gives letter to Emma*). Oh, Miss Woodhouse, what should I do? Is it a good letter? Or is it too short? Well?

Emma: A better written letter than I expected. A very good letter, with no grammatical errors. (*Returns it*).

Harriet: And? What shall I do?

Emma: Answer it – and speedily.

Harriet: But what shall I say? Oh do advise me.

Emma: Oh no, the letter had much better be all your own, with such expressions of concern for the pain you inflict as good manners require.

Harriet: (*Gasps*) Then you think I should refuse him?

Emma: But... You mean to return a favourable answer to Mr Martin's proposal?

Harriet: No. That is... Oh pray, tell me what I ought to do.

Emma: I shan't give you advice. But as a general rule, if a woman doubts whether she should accept a man, she ought to refuse. If you prefer Mr Martin to every other person, why should you hesitate? You blush. Does anybody else occur to you at this moment?

Harriet: (*Twisting the letter*) But Mr Martin is such an amiable young man and I'd no notion he liked me so very much. I don't want to make him unhappy. Won't he fancy me ungrateful?

Emma: Don't be carried away with gratitude, Harriet. At this moment, perhaps, Mr Elton is showing your picture to his mother and sisters, telling them how much more beautiful is the original.

Harriet: Miss Woodhouse, I've now quite determined, and really almost made up my mind to refuse. Do you think I'm right?

Emma: Perfectly. While you were at all in suspense I kept my feelings to myself but, now that you're so completely decided, I've no hesitation in approving. My own

sweet little friend, you've learned today that a woman is not to marry a man merely because he can write a tolerable letter.

Harriet: No, that's very true. I'm quite determined to refuse him. But how shall I do it? What shall I say?

Mr Knightley enters.

Scene Six.

Back inside.

Knightley: She what?

Emma: You heard me correctly.

Knightley: Then she's a greater simpleton than I believed her. But you must have it wrong.

Emma: I saw her answer.

Knightley: You *wrote* her answer.

Emma: And if I did, which I'm far from allowing, I shouldn't feel I was wrong. Mr Martin isn't nearly Harriet's equal –

Knightley: No, he's her superior! Harriet Smith is pretty and good-tempered and that's all. When Robert consulted me, I had no hesitation in advising such an excellent young man to marry. I was willing to trust there's no harm in her, and imagined even you, blinded by infatuation with the girl, would think it a fortunate match for her.

Emma: I can't help wondering at your knowing me so little. Robert Martin may be the richer, but the sphere in which she moves is much above his. For Harriet it would be a degradation.

Knightley: A degradation to illegitimacy to be married to a respectable gentleman-farmer?

Emma: I suspect you're largely annoyed because your encouragement to him's proved groundless. Your pride aside, however, you say Harriet's 'pretty and good-tempered and that's all'. Well, prettiness and good temper aren't trivial recommendations to the world. Till men fall in love with intelligent minds instead of pretty faces, girls like Harriet will have value. Indeed, if you were ever to marry, she might be the very woman for you.

Knightley: Upon my word, to hear you abusing reason in such a manner is enough to make me think it better to be without any.

Emma: Oh to be sure, it's incomprehensible to a man that a woman should ever refuse a marriage offer. You imagine us to be ready for anyone who asks.

Knightley: I imagine no such thing. But men of sense don't want silly wives, and men of family would recoil when the mystery of her parentage is revealed.

Emma: So Harriet, at seventeen, must accept the first offer she receives? No. Let her have time to look about her. She'll make her own choice when she's ready.

Knightley: You've been no friend to Miss Smith, Emma. In fact your mission to improve her won't do either of you any good. When was the last time you read a book?

Emma: Harriet and I plan to read a great deal together.

Knightley: I'm sure you'll find it much easier to chat. As for Harriet, you've puffed her up with such ideas of her own beauty, that in a little while nobody within her reach will be good enough for her. She's a girl who will marry somebody or other, but, if you teach her to be satisfied with no one but a man of consequence, she'll be a boarder at Mrs Goddard's the rest of her life – or till she grows desperate and is glad to catch at the old writing master's son. Let her marry Robert Martin. She'll be safe, respectable and happy forever.

Emma: What do you think of the weather, Mr Knightley? Shall we have rain?

Knightley: As a friend, Emma, I shall just hint to you that if Elton's the man you're aiming at, it'll be labour in vain. He knows the value of a good income. He also knows he's handsome and a great favourite wherever he goes, and I assure you he doesn't mean to throw himself away.

Emma: I thank you for your concern, but I'm not in want of counsel. I've done with matchmaking. I can't hope to equal my triumph with the Westons and shall leave off while I'm ahead.

Knightley: Good morning to you. (*Exits*).

Frank enters.

Scene Seven.

Yorkshire.

Frank: My dearest Jane, as soon as you're settled in Epsom, my heart will be too, and

To read the entire play, please contact Tim directly on tim@timluscombe.com

+44 (0) 777 978 9198

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