

EMMA and GEORGE

The Knightleys of Highbury

Robert T. McMaster

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by

Robert T. McMaster

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**EMMA AND GEORGE:
THE KNIGHTLEYS OF Highbury**

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SAMPLE



Cover: Painting by John Atkinson Grimshaw (1836-1893),
"Moonlit Country Road," oil on board, 1877.

THE QUIET LIFE

by Alexander Pope
(1688-1744)

*Happy the man whose wish and care
A few paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air
In his own ground.*

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PART I

*In which Emma Knightley delights in the perfect happiness
of the recent unions in Highbury*



The Knightleys Return

September 1814



ou will find no finer county in all of England than Surrey, and no finer village in Surrey than Highbury. It is a quiet, unpretentious place entirely lacking in frills or frivolous things. Along Broadway Lane, the main artery, a few dozen shops stand cheek by jowl—butcher, tailor, draper, and the like. A narrow stream tumbles noisily down the hillside west of the village, passing beneath the lane before emptying into a pond whose waters power a grist mill and a fulling mill. Back from the lane stands a slate-roofed school, a church of lichen-encrusted granite with timbered steeple, and a cemetery where lie the village's forebears of centuries past, honoured and commemorated in marble and slate.

The several thoroughfares that diverge from the village centre are lined with modest residences from one-story stone cottages with low, thatched roofs to taller brick and timber houses with steep gables and red-tiled roofs. Farther from the village and set off from the road by tall hedgerows or iron palings stand large, gracious country homes of varied styles—Tudor, Stuart, Georgian—residences of many of Highbury's most respectable and respected citizens, surrounded by formal gardens, carefully groomed shrubberies, stately avenues of pleached limes and pollarded elms, and brick walls festooned with elegant espaliers of apple and mulberry.

Adjoining Highbury to the east is Donwell Abbey, a large estate with one grand house and several small but prosperous farms, farms where abide men and women of common stock who tend their livestock, work the soil, and grow potatoes, corn, and turnips. Here too they raise their young, nourish them, school them, mold and shape them to become future citizens of the place of their birth.

On a cool September evening the soft amber glow of candlelight shone in many a window and the pungent aroma of burning peat and coal hung in the air as a cumbrous brougham pulled by a team of proud hackney horses rumbled through the quiet village. After passing through an iron sweep-gate, the carriage drew up at the entrance to Hartfield, the largest house in the parish. It carried one of Highbury's most upstanding citizens and his bride, just returned from a glorious wedding trip to the seaside resort of Sandgate, a day's journey to the south and east.

"Emma," whispered George Knightley to his bride who had fallen asleep, her head resting on his shoulder. He stroked her flaxen hair, then lightly kissed her cheek. "Emma, dearest, we are at home." Emma Knightley raised her head, wiped the sleep from her eyes, then peered into the darkness unconvinced.

But suddenly there appeared, bobbing up and down in the carriage window before her, a small bright smiling face, eyes flashing gleefully.

"Welcome home, Auntie Emma—welcome home, Uncle George," cried six-year-old Henry Knightley. He was joined by two younger siblings, John and Bella, then by his parents, John and Isabella Knightley, in offering their heartfelt greetings to the newlyweds.

As the couple stepped down from the carriage, Mr. Henry Woodhouse, father of Emma and Isabella, could be observed in a drawing room window, smiling anxiously while clutching a woollen scarf about his neck. Moments later his family were gathered around him. Tears trickled down his cheeks as he greeted his younger daughter, then shook the hand of his new son-in-law.

"We were very worried," said Mr. Woodhouse sternly, "for fear you were stranded somewhere in Kent with a lame horse or a broken axle. It must have been a frightful journey for you both," his lips trembling at the very thought.

Emma kissed her father on the cheek. "It was a long journey, Papa, I will own, but one entirely lacking in catastrophes—for as you can see, we are home at last, safe and sound."

There followed the presentation of gifts to the children, wooden toys of a nautical theme purchased along the promenade at

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Sandgate—a sailboat, a fishing trawler, a lighthouse, and the like. Two-year-old George and baby Emma who lay asleep upstairs would receive their gifts in the morning.

"Tell us about your holiday by the sea," said young Henry, eyes shining. "Was it just wonderful?"

"It was more than wonderful, Henry, it was like a dream," replied Emma, her eyes grown wide as saucers, her rosy cheeks framed by ringlets of golden hair that sparkled in the candlelight. "Of course, you who are but six years of age have visited the seaside often. But for your old auntie, this was her first."

They found comfortable accommodation in the seaside resort of Sandgate, she reported, strolled arm-in-arm along the promenade, partook of sumptuous meals in the hotel dining room, and bathed in the healthful sea waters.

"You bathed in the sea?" asked young Henry, wide-eyed. "Were there sharks? Or whales?" Everyone laughed.

"No, Henry, I am afraid we did not see any such creatures," replied Emma. "We bathed in the pool of sea water at our hotel. The ladies on one side, the men on the other, naturally."

Three-year-old Bella crawled up into her grandfather's lap and lay her head against his chest. The old man stroked her chestnut hair and her eyes began to glaze over as she listened.

"And one day we went for a sailing voyage faaaar out on the Channel," added George, extending his arm to suggest the vastness of the sea.

"Were you frightened?" asked five-year-old John.

"I was not," replied George, then added with an impish grin, "but your Auntie Emma..."

"...was not afraid," interrupted Emma most emphatically as she slapped her husband's knee, "not in the least."

George lowered his voice, leaned toward his nephews, and whispered loud enough for all to hear: "Your auntie clutched my arm like a smithy's vice the entire voyage. And she looked as though she would become ill with the pitching of the vessel."

Emma made a comical grimace for the benefit of the children, much to their amusement.

"But she did not," added George.

"And your return," inquired the senior John Knightley, always a man of facts, "you traveled by coach from Sandgate to Riverhead?"

"Yes," replied George, "through some very fine country, the Downs, and along the old Pilgrim Way. We alighted briefly in Ashford before continuing on to Maidstone. We encountered quite a rainstorm in Aylesford that slowed our progress some."

"But as soon as we arrived at Riverhead," added Emma, "there was James with the brougham. What a relief to have our own private conveyance for the last part of our journey."

Mr. Woodhouse looked heartsick. "I do not understand why you felt compelled to undertake such a hazardous journey. I should have prevented it if I could."

Emma stroked her father's arm. "Well, I am most thankful that you did not, sir, but I am very happy to be back home at Hartfield, I assure you."

"You must be very weary," replied the old man.

With that the children were ushered off to bed while the others sat musing by the fireside, savouring the peace and domestic harmony as the flames flickered and crackled.

"And what intelligence from Highbury?" inquired Emma.

"Severe damage was wrought to the lower road by last week's rain," noted John Knightley. "The River Mole rose above its banks and washed away fully a quarter mile of roadway. It will be on the Parish Council agenda, I have no doubt."

As a member of the Parish Council, George evinced genuine concern at this development while Emma tried her best to show some little interest in the matter.

Then her sister spoke up. "Mr. Elton delivered a very fine sermon on the Sabbath last, I must say."

John Knightley rolled his eyes and groaned. "The man is tedious. And his homilies are insipid. He would do better to read to us from one of Reverend Fordyce's sermons than to blather on so." He exhaled loudly. "Useless—utterly useless."

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Isabella ignored her husband's comments. "Mrs. Elton has been overseeing the chancel flower arrangements quite ably in your absence, Emma, you will be gladdened to know."

John snorted his disapproval, whether of the flower arrangements or of the arranger it was unclear, but he chose not to elaborate.

Mr. Woodhouse then spoke up. "Emma, your friend Miss Smith seems to be everywhere in the village, and quite happily. Or so I am told—I have not seen her myself, of course." The man seldom ventured beyond the confines of Hartfield.

"Mrs. *Martin*, Papa, she is Mrs. *Martin* now, remember? Mrs. *Harriet Martin*. Oh, I am so very glad to hear it. I must see Harriet soon and learn how she is enjoying married life at Abbey Mill Farm."

Now John Knightley turned to Emma with a wry smile: "Miss Bates has been asking after you almost daily."

Emma returned her brother's expression in kind. "She no doubt will have several letters from Jane Churchill to read to me." Her gaze shifted to her sister. "I once found Jane Fairfax's letters tedious, but I do look forward to learning of the Churchills and their new home at Enscombe."

Isabella grinned. "Well, Miss Bates knows that you are returning today. I would not be at all surprised to find her at our door early in the morrow—letter in hand!"


Everyone laughed. Mr. Woodhouse yawned.

With that the weary travelers retired, still aglow with memories of their holiday by the sea yet comforted to be once again in the bosom of their family, no longer as Emma Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley, but now as Mr. and Mrs. George Knightley.



Bridge over the Mole, Cobham.

The Squire of Donwell

he following morning while Emma still slept, George Knightley rose and dressed quietly, then set out just as the sun was rising over the Surrey countryside—his destination, Donwell Abbey, but a half mile distant. His father had inherited Donwell at a young age, married, and there raised two sons. Upon the death of the patriarch, the estate passed to the elder son, George, who would have been happy to share his inheritance with his younger brother. But John Knightley was not enamoured of the country life and found employment as a solicitor in a large mercantile firm in London. Soon he married Isabella Woodhouse and the couple relocated to Brunswick Square in London where they began raising a family.

Back in Highbury, George Knightley enjoyed all the pleasures and fulfillments one could wish for as overseer of the demesne that was his legacy. It was no small occupation, encompassing four farms, several dozen workers, plus their families who lived on and worked those holdings. That the Squire of Donwell at age thirty-seven remained unmarried was of no small interest to those who knew him. But he was content, he told himself—content with his home, with his manorial duties, and with a small circle of friends close to hand.

Of all George Knightley's friends, the Woodhouses were the nearest and dearest. Almost daily would he walk the well-trodden footpath from Donwell Abbey to Hartfield to visit Mr. Woodhouse and his younger daughter. Emma was some sixteen years George's junior and was for many years more a little sister than a friend. But with the passage of time the two became nearly equal in maturity. Even so it came as something of a surprise to all, themselves included, when years of mutual affection and admiration at last turned to betrothal, then marriage.

In pounds and pence, George Knightley was not the most affluent man in Highbury, far from it. True, he owned the largest portion of

the land and received all the regard due the squire of such an estate, but as to monetary wealth, he was not an especially rich man. His wealth derived from the productivity of those lands, the crops they produced, and the livestock that grazed those pastures. But most of that treasure went to his tenants who worked the land. True, they leased those farms from Donwell, but the Donwell rents were known to be among the lowest in Surrey.

Despite the grandeur of his home and the extent of his holdings, George Knightley lived modestly, eschewing all manner of ostentation. He could not abide elaborate equipage: he owned but one small carriage and a single team of carriage horses, and he refused to ride about in that carriage unless it was necessary, preferring to walk or ride on horseback to meetings and social engagements in and around Highbury. He entertained rarely, and when he did, his were always small, informal affairs shared with his closest friends—picnics, soirees, and the like. He was not fond of balls, galas, or extravagance in any form for that matter.

One of the greatest burdens for a farmer in England in that time was the tithes, taxes owed to the local parish that amounted to about a tenth of the products of the land. For many farmers, tithes alone reduced their income by half and were thus a subject of great controversy. But at Donwell, those tithes were paid by Mr. Knightley. It was a matter of principle to him. How could he expect his tenants to work the land to its fullest when at year's end they had hardly enough on which to survive? Such consideration earned him the respect of his tenants and admiration of the larger populace of Highbury.

For a man so closely tied to his estate as Mr. Knightley, two weeks away seemed an eternity. While absent, he had been favoured by brief posts from his housekeeper, Mrs. Hodges, assuring him that all was well at Donwell Abbey. Nevertheless, he longed to walk those fields, gaze upon that grand house, and enjoy once again the pleasures and perquisites of the master and overseer of Donwell. Most of all he wanted to know that his tenants were all well, they and their families, for they were not merely tenants—they were

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friends and co-stewards with Mr. Knightley of the lands that were his birthright.

George Knightley spent over an hour at Donwell this morning, first conferring with Mrs. Hodges, then with Mr. William Larkins, the property manager, before sitting at his desk leafing through a stack of post that had accrued in his absence—bills for seed, fertilizer, farrier services, notices of parish meetings, petitions from local charities, as well as letters from family and friends.

Finally, he set forth once again. In the barns he gazed admiringly upon the chickens, the sows and their piglets, and several dozen Southdown sheep, all of which appeared clean and well fed. In the paddock beyond he noted with pleasure several horses including a mare and her foal and a pair of massive shire draught horses. Bessie, his beloved old equine friend, looked up from her grazing and ambled slowly in his direction, accepting a few strokes on her graying muzzle. In the more distant pasture a small herd of shorthorn cattle and a pair of oxen could be seen grazing placidly in the morning sunlight, steam rising in plumes from their backs. The sight of those oxen gave him particular satisfaction, for they were born in the stable before his very eyes when he was but a boy.

At length he walked along the lime avenue, through the orchard of apple and pear, and finally into the deep oakwood beyond where the twisted and contorted trunks of the sessile oaks lent the place a certain air of mystery. This had been one of his favourite boyhood haunts, a place of magic and enchantment, and so it was still, evoking memories of long ago, fantasies of knights on white horses, of hooded figures in dark shadows, of sinister ravens and magpies perched silently on wind-wizened snags, waiting to pounce. George Knightley was much too old for such childishness, yet even now the place triggered a sensation of disquiet, of unease.

Emerging at last from the woodland, he entered the broad, green fields of Abbey Mill Farm where the warm rays of sun lightened his mood. The way here was lined with dense hedgerows of lichened hawthorn, hazle, and spindle. From those tangled margins protruded the slender stalks of foxglove with their deep pink blossoms and steeple-like meadowsweet that felt like old friends.

He soon spied four young men at work, one scything, the other three raking and gathering hay. The tallest was a farmer he knew well and whose company and conversation he always prized, and he watched him swing the scythe, his long arms and broad shoulders bending easily to the task. As he laboured, he smiled, as if recalling a pleasant memory of the morning, or possibly the previous night. When he saw his master approaching, he immediately ceased his exertions, stood erect, and doffed his leather cap.

"Good morning to you, Mr. Knightley," said the young farmer, leaning on his scythe as he wiped his forehead with a kerchief.

"And to you, Mr. Martin. Could there be a finer day for September, now?"

"Very fine, indeed, sir, very fine," replied the young man, his green eyes shining, "When did you and Mrs. Knightley return to Hartfield?"

"Late last eve, very late."

"And the seaside, was it pleasant?" asked Mr. Martin.

"Oh, quite pleasant, yes. So much so that we lingered longer than we should, taking the waters one last time yesterday morning, which explains our late return." Their eyes met. "And you and Mrs. Martin are well, I trust?"

"We are, sir. Harriet would be out here helping us with the haying if I did not object that it was improper work for a lady, especially an educated lady like herself."

Robert Martin had only recently celebrated his twenty-fifth birthday, he and his spouse their one-month wedding anniversary. He was tall, fair-haired, not perhaps handsome in the eyes of some, but cleared-eyed and intelligent, possessed of a pleasing disposition entirely lacking in guile or pretense.

As manager of Abbey Mill Farm, Robert Martin was a tireless worker while the sun shone, but even after dark in the small cottage he and Harriet occupied, he busied himself by candlelight, studying his account records, reading one of his choice collection of books on farming, or sketching out his garden plans for the coming season. He was a farmer, for sure, one who loved to work the soil, to tend the livestock. But what made him especially valuable to Donwell Abbey

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was his informed judgment on matters such as managing the soil, maintaining the equipment, and husbanding the livestock, as well as marketing, pricing, selling, and distributing the fruits of his labours.

Robert Martin, George recalled, attended the village school for just three or four years, until his father died and he was needed on the farm. Even at that tender age, he was no stranger to hard graft, taking on his new responsibilities with earnestness and energy. What set him apart from his peers was his analytical approach to farming. He was forever observing, measuring, recording the progress of crops and the success of various seed varieties, counting fruits harvested or lost to rot or decay. By fifteen he was a better farmer than many men twice his age.

One might have expected George Knightley and Robert Martin to be on only the most formal terms. Abbey Mill, after all, was just one part of the sprawling Donwell estate. But relations between the two men could not have been more cordial, especially now that Robert was married to the former Harriet Smith. For Robert had consulted Mr. Knightley regarding his proposal to Miss Smith. George had encouraged the young man in that regard, then consoled him when his proposal was at first rebuffed. But in time the young couple did marry, and George was determined to do whatever he could to make their tenancy at Abbey Mill Farm agreeable, both out of friendship and for the benefits they could bring to Donwell. Emma had not always shared George's admiration for Robert Martin, privately counseling Harriet to turn down his first proposal. But eventually she came to accept the match. In this instance, she finally had to confess, perhaps Mr. Knightley's judgment was superior to hers—perhaps!

George Knightley stroked the waist-high stems of timothy, fescue, and clover that waved in the breeze at his knees. "Perfect time for harvesting your hay, Robert. It is dry but not too dry, and stout-stemmed as well. Perfect."

Robert nodded and smiled, then looked skyward warily. "But the almanack warns of rain soon, so we must finish the cutting, loading, and storage in the next few days. Then it's the turnips, cabbage, and mangels—and the apples at Donwell Abbey."

"Mr. Larkins tells me the quarry will deliver the chalk next week as well," replied George, referring to the pit on the west side of Donwell where chalk was dug and crushed, then spread on Donwell's own fields or sold to farmers as far away as Essex.

The young man shook his head. "It is ever the way with September, sir—everything has to be completed at once."

"Well, Robert, I am at your disposal if you need me—for stacking, thatching, or hauling the hay."

"Oh, thank you, sir. But my brother Jacob has already been engaged along with two friends. You need not worry, sir." He pointed to the lower meadow where the young trio were busy tying and stacking the sheaves.

"With Robert Martin in charge, I never worry. But do not hesitate to ask if you need an extra pair of hands. I have been a man of leisure for nearly a fortnight and feel in need of some honest labour." He leaned in and spoke in a low, conspiratorial tone: "And honestly, after nearly two weeks of my constant companionship, I dare say Mrs. Knightley will be happy to have me out from underfoot at Hartfield for a day or two."

Robert laughed. "Well, thank you, sir. But I think we have it in hand." Just then a voice could be heard from the direction of the Abbey Mill homestead.

"My sister Mary seems to be needing me, sir."

"Go ahead, Robert, I shall be on my way. But do not fail to ask if you find I can be of some assistance."

"Thank you," replied the young man. "And welcome home, sir, to you and to Mrs. Knightley."

George nodded and smiled. "And please do extend my best wishes to Mrs. Martin."

George retraced his steps toward Donwell, heartened by a sense of confidence in the affairs of Abbey Mill Farm under the strong and steady hand of Robert Martin. As he passed once again through the oakwood, he spied a raven perched silently on a branch above the footpath. The sight sent another shiver up his spine accompanied by a vague sense of foreboding. Were he a superstitious sort, he might have regarded that creature as an omen, some kind of warning of


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what was to come at Abbey Mill Farm. But he promptly dismissed the notion as mere idle musing, a vestige of the overactive imagination of that little boy of long ago. Or was it?



In Farnham Churchyard.

A Talker Upon Little Matters

mma Knightley stood before her mirror as her maid Lydia brushed her hair. Hearing the patter of little feet in the corridor accompanied by the animated chatter of her nephews and nieces made her smile, and she laughed to herself as she recalled those little heads bobbing up and down in the carriage window upon their arrival the previous evening. A few minutes later she joined them in the breakfast room and watched the children as they rapidly devoured everything that Mrs. Serle had prepared for them, porridge, poached eggs, and soda biscuits.

"Well, sister," began Isabella, "I suppose this is the day when your married life begins in earnest." Then she added in a melodramatic tone, "the honeymoon, alas, is over."

Emma nodded. "True, it had to end." She took one sip of tea, then gazed at the vase of roses on the table. She drew one of the blooms toward her and took in its perfume. "But I intend to make every day of our married lives together just that special—that memorable."

John Knightley could not resist a sardonic chuckle. "I wish you every good fortune in that, dearest Emma—both you and my brother."

By mid-morning Emma and her father had seen off Isabella, John, and their children on their journey back to London. Mr. Woodhouse watched forlornly as the carriage drew slowly away, then disappeared between the hedges that lined the way to the sweep-gate. A few minutes later father and daughter sat together in the breakfast room close to the fire enjoying their tea.

"Hartfield will be very peaceful once again," began Mr. Woodhouse, "with Isabella and her family gone."

"Those children are a delight," replied Emma, "are they not?"

Mr. Woodhouse smiled and agreed. "Little Bella is very attentive to her grandpapa. Her older brothers like nothing more than to run and frolic and wrestle with their father or their uncle. But Bella

climbs into my lap and talks to me. She is a very sweet little girl," he added wistfully.

"He is already missing his grandchildren," thought Emma with a smile.

"Now where is Mr. Knightley?" asked Mr. Woodhouse, a wrinkle of worry crossing his forehead. "I am surprised that he was not here to see off his brother and family."

"Oh, he is surely at Donwell, Papa. He thought of little else while we were at Sandgate. I have no doubt that he is walking through every room, every barn and stall, and every path and field, reacquainting himself. I heard him tell John last evening that he would be traveling to town on business tomorrow and hoping to have tea at Brunswick Square."

Then she asked, "Are you comfortable, Papa? May I get you a quilt for your legs?"

"No, I think not, thank you, Emma."

"Shall I call for more tea?"

The old man smiled at his daughter's face that glowed in the morning light.

"Not yet, but soon—thank you, my dearest." He took her hand and stroked it. "I am so happy to have you back at Hartfield."

A few minutes later Emma was staring into the fire, memories of those magical days and nights in Sandgate dancing in her head. Then she looked up to see her father nodding off. Silence now engulfed her and she fell into a brown study.

She rose silently so as not to wake her father, then walked through to the drawing room. She gazed about at the several graceful sofas and upholstered chairs, the elegant lamps of bisque and brass, the velvet-textured wallpaper of peonies and roses she herself had selected for the room.

And the portrait of Katherine Woodhouse, Emma's mother, as a young woman. Their eyes met in silent remembrance, a single tear welling on Emma's cheek. She quickly wiped it away. Hartfield was now Emma's domain, hers exclusively as it had been since Isabella married and moved to Brunswick Square some six years ago. The thought lifted her spirits. Emma relished the challenge of keeping

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the house comfortable and attractive, of achieving the highest possible standard of decor. It was, after all, a paragon of good taste, of the most modern domestic style, that all the finer homes in Highbury might aspire to.

In the dining room she paused before the long table, thinking as she did of planning menus with Mrs. Serle, of instructing the new footman and maid in proper serving methods. Through the window she looked out on the gardens and thought of the projects she would undertake with Mr. Jones, the gardener, over the winter months, a new fishpond among the shrubbery, an expanded bed of roses along the main path. She returned to the breakfast room where her father was sipping his tea.

This, then, was how the days of Emma Knightley would heretofore be spent, she reflected: placating her elderly father, occupying herself with domestic affairs, and little else. She paused at that thought, "...and little else." Now she found herself recalling the good times she had enjoyed in Highbury in the last few years, the social gatherings for back-gammon and cards, walks in the shrubberies, parties, and, of course, the ball at the Crown Inn last spring, all with that small circle of good friends.

Emma's gaze now turned to that portrait she herself had painted not long ago, the one of Miss Harriet Smith, her complexion like roses, the very epitome of youthful health and vigour. Emma smiled at the memory. "That intimate group of lively young women and men, what has become of them?" she asked herself. Harriet, Anne Taylor, Jane Fairfax, Frank Churchill, Mr. Elton, every one, every last one—now married—Jane and Frank now living far away—Mr. Elton and his bride close at hand but alas no longer within that inner circle of friends.

She rose and walked to the window, looking out on the gardens. "They must not end," she told herself, "those joyful days of the recent past." She would not let them be but a memory. She vowed to remain close to Harriet and Anne, to visit them or encourage their visits as often as possible, to maintain contact with Jane and Frank as best she could with a weekly letter. As to the Eltons...she hesitated, then absently rearranged a vase of flowers on the windowsill.

Perhaps she could mend her frayed friendship with Mr. Elton...perhaps. But as to Mrs. Elton, well...

What was needed, Emma surmised, was a larger circle that included some younger persons. Then in her mind's eye she traveled the lanes and byways of Highbury, counting as she did the number of young unmarried friends, or potential friends, whom she might hope to secure for this new social circle. There were a few, a precious few. So much the more reason to cultivate them.

Just then a commotion could be heard in the passage. The maid entered the breakfast room. "Miss Bates has arrived."

Mr. Woodhouse smiled. "Oh, excellent, do bring her in, please. And we shall be requiring more tea, Ellen."

At that moment Miss Hetty Bates appeared, her plain features now rosy from the brisk ten-minute walk from the village. The daughter of the late vicar of Highbury, she and her mother now lived in a modest apartment in the village centre. Miss Bates was a friend to all, even though her constant, often mindless tittering could be exhausting. But all who knew her were more than willing to accommodate her and her elderly mother.

"Good morning, Mr. Woodhouse, Miss Woodhouse—er, ah, Mrs. Knightley." She bowed to them both in turn.

"Good day, Miss Bates," replied Emma, bowing in return.

"I hope you did not get a chill from the unhealthy dews this morning, my good friend," interjected Mr. Woodhouse. "Come, sit here by the fire. Please forgive me for not rising to greet you, but my rheumatism is at its worst in the morning."

"Oh, thank you sir and madam, thank you ever so much. You are always so kind to this old lady. The most hospitable house in Highbury, I always say. My, but the grounds are looking fine, sir. Your gardener is to be commended. The roses and chrysanthemums are particularly lovely. I do hope you are both well. I am not disturbing you, am I?"

"Not at all, Miss Bates, not at all," replied the old man. "And you, are you in good health? And your mother, bless her?"

Her smile faded. "I am well, sir, very well, indeed. But Mother has been poorly of late, I regret to report—a cough that comes and

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goes—and listlessness. She sleeps morning, noon, and night. And her colour is not what it should be.”

“I am very sorry to hear it,” replied the old man. “You must call Perry. Perry will know what is needed. He is a good man with much knowledge of infections and putrefactions.”

Mr. Perry was the local apothecary and was held in high regard by everyone in Highbury. He had attended Oxford briefly, then trained in a London hospital before taking up his practice in Highbury some fifteen years earlier. He lived in the centre of the village with his wife and a large gaggle of little Perrys, and could be observed setting out on his horse early every morning to attend a mother in labour, an injured farmer, or a croupy child.

“Yes,” replied Miss Bates. “I stopped at his home on my walk here, but he was away. I did leave a message for him with Mrs. Perry. She is always so kind, is she not? The kindest person in Highbury, I always say—oh, excepting of course your good selves.”

Emma spoke up. “Let me ask Mrs. Serle to prepare some thin gruel for your mother. It is guaranteed to be of benefit for complaints of all sorts.”

“Oh, yes,” offered Mr. Woodhouse. “No better gruel than that of Cook’s. No better.”

“Well, please do not put her to any trouble,” answered Miss Bates. “She has more than enough to worry about preparing meals for the two of you—er, well, three of you now, is it not?”

“And what news from Yorkshire?” inquired Emma. “Are Jane and Frank both well?” referring to Miss Bates’s niece, Jane Fairfax, now Jane Churchill. She and Frank Churchill were married just one week before Emma and George’s wedding.

“Thank you so much for inquiring, Miss Woodhouse—oh, I mean Mrs. Knightley.” She blushed. “Pardon me, but I have such difficulty remembering all these changes. My goodness, Jane, my own niece, has been married nearly a month and still I find myself addressing my letters to Jane Fairfax when it should be Jane Churchill. Oh, my, I must...”

“But they are both in good health, I trust—Jane and Frank?” interrupted Emma.

"Oh, yes, I am sure of it. I am quite sure of it, although we have received no communication from Jane in over a fortnight—most unusual." Her eyes seemed to lose their focus as she tried to recollect. Then they brightened. "But I did receive some intelligence from Colonel and Mrs. Campbell that will interest you."

The Campbells had taken in Jane Fairfax at the age of seven following the death of her mother and raised her as their own, providing her all the advantages of education and culture that the great city of London had to offer. Their daughter, Miss Louisa Campbell, was the same age as Jane, and the two had become as close as sisters.

Miss Bates's eyes shone. "Mrs. Louisa Dixon, they have informed us, will soon be in confinement."

Emma smiled. "Oh, Miss Bates, that is wonderful news. Do you suppose Jane knows she will be an aunt?"

"I imagine she does, but as I say, we have not received a letter from Enscombe in over a fortnight. But one will arrive very soon, I have no doubt. And when it does, you shall be the first to hear of it, I promise." She paused. "And your vacation by the sea," she inquired, "was it lovely?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Bates. Sandgate was delightful. We walked the promenade several times each day and bathed in the waters many times. I must say the seawater does impart a most healthful sensation—most healthful. I am mortified to admit that it was the first time I had ever bathed in the ocean—the first time I had even *seen* the sea. Have you, Miss Bates?"

"Oh, my, yes, quite a few times. Once at Plymouth, and once on the Isle of Wight. And—well..." Again her eyes seemed to dim as she tried to recollect.

The conversation then turned to local affairs, to the gardens of Highbury, the hay and wheat crops, a bit of gossip about the Eltons and their house guests, the Sucklings, from Bristol, and the Coles and their fine new carriage, a phaeton.

When at last Miss Bates hinted that she must take her leave, Emma excused herself. In a few minutes she returned with several small parcels.

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"For Mrs. Bates, here is some of Mrs. Serle's finest gruel. And arrowroot—some find it distasteful, but I believe it is effective. And a mustard plaster as well."

"Oh, thank you, Miss Woodhouse, thank you ever so much." She stood, paused, and blushed again. "There I go again, Miss Knightley—eh, Mrs. Knightley, yes, of course, Mrs."

When all their goodbyes had been said, Emma followed her guest to the front entry, then watched as she walked down the lane toward Highbury. While her endless tattle could be tiresome, Miss Bates was good-hearted, there could be no doubt of that. And, as Emma's father often reminded her, Miss Bates and her mother, once comfortable in a large home, were now in reduced circumstances and therefore deserving of respect and special consideration.

Miss Bates turned and gave one last goodbye wave. Emma sometimes mocked the lady among her friends and on one occasion, in an unguarded moment, made a remark that as soon as it was made was regretted. It was at Box Hill in mid-summer, and the memory of it still gave her pain. And the scolding she later received from Mr. Knightley only served to deepen her remorse. After a sleepless night back at Hartfield, Emma resolved to mend the wound she had inflicted on her old friend. She brought Miss Bates and her mother apple tarts, Mrs. Serle's special apple tarts that were admired by everyone in Highbury. It fell short of an outright apology, merely a token really, but the lady seemed mollified by the gesture. And Emma made herself a resolution to visit the Bates home more often, to bring gifts, and hope she might undo the damage done that day on Box Hill.

As Emma turned to reenter her front door, she spied a familiar figure making his way through the formal gardens toward her. She smiled and waved, the colour rising in her cheeks. How often had she welcomed this man into their home as a neighbour, friend, and brother-in-law. Suddenly she was seized by a realization. "This gentleman is no longer a friend or neighbour, nor a mere brother by marriage," she thought to herself. "He is my husband, now and forevermore." Then she added softly, "I am to be congratulated on my choice," chuckling even as Mr. Knightley drew near.

George Knightley stopped and looked dubiously at his smiling bride. "What is it that amuses you, dearest Emma? Is my waistcoat askew?"

Emma giggled, then shook her head.

"Or my hat—is it soiled?" He took it off and dusted it.

She took his arm. "No, sir, your haberdashery is impeccable," she noted with a twinkle in her eye.

"Well, what then?"

Emma smiled. "As I watched your approach, I was commending myself on my good judgment in my choice of husband. I do believe I chose better for myself than for certain others." Now both laughed, recalling Emma's several misadventures as a matchmaker.

"Well, I am happy to hear it. I hope you will feel the same when we are in our dotage." Again they laughed together.

"Speaking of which, was that the good Miss Bates who just left?"

"Yes, we had tea and shared some news. She wanted to know all about our time by the sea, was it lovely and all."

"And you replied?"

"That it was as lovely as it could possibly be. I described it all, our lodgings, our meals, our bathings, all in minute detail."

"Not everything about our honeymoon, I should hope, in such detail."

Emma blushed. He drew her to him and kissed her firmly, as if to remind them both of those memories. Then they entered the house together.

"What else in the way of news, beside the adventures of newlyweds?" asked George in the passage.

"She tells us that Mrs. Bates has been unwell latterly," replied Emma. "Some kind of infection or ague, I gathered."

"I am sorry to hear it. Mrs. Bates always seems so very frail. I hope she improves soon."

"I had Mrs. Serle make up some of her special gruel. We sent her off with that and some potions and plasters."

George smiled but noticed a wistful sadness in Emma's countenance.

"Emma, darling, what is it?"

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Emma sighed. "I have made a vow to myself, a solemn vow."

"A vow?"

Emma nodded. "A vow, to do whatever I can for the Misses Bates."

"But you always do, Emma dear."

Again she sighed. "Not always in the past, I confess." And their eyes met in mutual understanding. "But heretofore, always."

From the next room came the voice of Mr. Woodhouse. "Emma, is that Mr. Knightley I hear?"

"It is, indeed, sir," replied George as he and Emma entered the breakfast room. "Back from my morning constitutional."

"I hope you were well bundled against that cold wind."

"Cold wind? Sir, it is very mild today. In the full sun one might even call it warm."

He turned to Emma. "After I left Donwell, I passed through the Abbey Mill fields. Mr. Robert Martin is haying. He certainly can swing a scythe with the best of them. He has his three young helpers, Jacob and the Eames boys, hard at work tying and stacking."

"Did you see my friend, Harriet?"

"No, I merely conversed with Robert. I have offered to help with harvesting of the hay should he need assistance. But he insists that he and his helpers can manage."

Emma's brow was knit.

"What is the meaning of that look, dearest Emma?"

"Well, to be truthful I am a bit perplexed as to why the Squire of Donwell must be out in the fields labouring. Cannot your tenants be relied upon to do the work? Is it not their job?"

"It is, but I find hard labour good for my constitution. Not every day, but regularly. I have always helped when I am able. Especially Mr. Martin because I know my assistance will be welcome and my time put to good use."

Emma nodded.

"And further, I think it a good thing for the lord of the manor to see the workings of his estate firsthand, the better to understand the nature of the work, what is required, and what if anything is wanting in the way of tools and equipage. I do believe it makes one a

better manager of an estate to be from time to time down in the dust."

Emma winced.

"I only worry about your health, Mr. Knightley," interjected Mr. Woodhouse. "Do be careful not to overdo, or to cut off a toe with one of those infernal blades."

"Thank you, sir, for your concern. I promise I shall exercise the utmost caution, rest assured."

George turned to Emma. "What other news from Miss Bates? Anything from Enscombe?" referring to the Churchill estate in Yorkshire where Frank and Jane now resided.

"To be truthful, I was a bit hesitant to ask her about Jane. You know how she can ramble on regarding her niece. But it seems she has not heard any news in a fortnight. When she gets her next letter from Jane, she assured me we shall be the first to know." All three laughed.

"But she has heard from the Campbells," added Emma.

"Oh? The Colonel and Mrs. Campbell, in London? And are they both well?"

"Very well, indeed," replied Emma, lifting her eyebrows to herald good news. "It seems Miss Campbell—that is, Mrs. Dixon—will soon be delivered of a child."

"Oh, how wonderful for them," replied George. Here was another sensitive subject for the newlyweds. For Emma had at one time imagined some attachment between Jane Fairfax and Mr. Dixon. For a time she even harboured the notion that the pianoforte given anonymously to Jane the previous winter was a gift from Mr. Dixon, suggesting his ardent affection for her, all notions that seemed utterly errant once Jane and Frank's engagement was made public.

But Mr. Woodhouse grimaced. "I worry so about matters of maternity. They are fraught."

"Well, Miss Bates assures me that Mrs. Dixon is a healthy young woman, Papa. And I would not be surprised if she has the benefit of a lying-in hospital in Dublin with doctors in attendance, much as has

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Isabella in London." Emma hesitated. "I must write Mrs. Dixon and congratulate her. But I do wish to hear from Jane and Frank."

"Well, you will have another opportunity to learn of the Churchills very soon," offered Mr. Woodhouse. "James has just returned from Randalls with a message. Miss Taylor would like to visit this afternoon, if that would be acceptable."

"You mean Mrs. Weston," scolded Emma. "That would be most acceptable, Papa. I am longing to see the Westons."



Poor Miss Taylor

Anne Weston arrived at Hartfield shortly after mid-day to warm greetings from Emma, George, and Mr. Woodhouse. A woman of grace and refinement, Anne Taylor had been the governess of the two daughters of Henry Woodhouse since the death of his wife. While both enjoyed the decorative arts and music, neither child was a particularly promising scholar. Emma always claimed to love literature and regularly compiled impressive lists of books to be read, although how many she actually read was never clear. But regarding great literature, there could be no doubt that Emma Woodhouse had the best of intentions. Nevertheless, Anne was tireless in the care and education of the two little girls. And in time her relationship with Emma became more that of a friend than a teacher.

Emma claimed to be the first to envision a match between her governess and their affable neighbour, Mr. Weston, Captain Charles Weston to be precise. She could cite numerous instances where she gently prodded and urged the couple on. And soon enough Anne Taylor and Mr. Weston married. All who knew them applauded the alliance, all, that is, except for Mr. Woodhouse.

Henry Woodhouse, Sr., was the master of Hartfield, the home where he was born some sixty years ago. On his twenty-first birthday he inherited the house from his father along with a considerable fortune. He took great pride in that grand residence and its grounds, overseeing half a dozen domestic workers as well as several gardeners who tended the many flower beds, shrubberies, and allées.

Henry was nearly forty before he married, and his wife soon bore him two little girls, Isabella and Emma. They delighted him, though he could never worry himself enough about his family's health and welfare. Soon his worries were borne out when his wife died. It was a loss that took its toll on his constitution, leaving him frail and more fearful of injury and disease than ever.

While a strong advocate for the virtues of fresh air and exercise since a young man, Mr. Woodhouse emerged from his home only rarely in his advanced age. He had become a valetudinarian, consumed with fears for his well-being and that of his daughters and grandchildren, always watchful for the slightest cough or ache or the merest touch of fever that might presage the onset of a fierce infection. He enjoyed socializing with his many friends in Highbury, so long as they were willing to make the journey to Hartfield and spare him the hazards and worries of travel.

"Poor Miss Taylor," Mr. Woodhouse was prone to repeat again and again, "why would she wish to marry when she could have remained quite happily at Hartfield for the rest of her life?" And now that the deed was done, the old man complained of how rarely they saw her, even though the Westons and the Woodhouses visited one another nearly every day.

When all were seated in the drawing room and tea was poured, Anne sighed. "Well, Mr. and Mrs. Knightley, welcome home to Highbury. Do tell me all about your wedding trip to the seashore."

Once again Emma enumerated the many pleasures of Sandgate, the water, the sun, the seafood, their walks along the parade. "It was delightful in every possible way," she added.

"And you, Mr. Knightley, are you in concord with your wife?" asked Mrs. Weston.

George smiled. "Absolutely, it was delightful."

"Although he worried constantly about Donwell," added Emma with a smile, her eyes meeting Anne's.

George shook his head. "No, I did not worry. I thought about it, I confess, and compiled lists of projects to be accomplished before winter. But I found very little to worry about."

"And little Anna is well, I trust?" asked Emma, referring to the Westons' baby, now about eight weeks old.

Anne assured them that her daughter was in good health. "Miss Bickerton sees to her daily which is a great help," she explained. Emma had heard Harriet speak highly of Nancy Bickerton, a friend and fellow parlour-boarder with Harriet at Mrs. Goddard's school.

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At last Emma looked wide-eyed at Anne. "And what of your son and his bride? I trust they are by now well-established in their new home?"

"They are," replied Anne. "For a few weeks they stayed at Enscombe House with Mr. Churchill awaiting the completion of renovations to Southby House. But that work lately has been accomplished and they have now removed to their new home. It is ideal, I dare say. It is not far from the main house, but with its own gardens and the prettiest little pond, according to Jane. She had a good deal to say in her latest letter about the prospect, the beauty, the tranquility. Yes, I do believe they are well settled and as happy as husband and wife could be."

"And how does Jane occupy herself?" inquired Emma.

"Well, she has her pianoforte and her books. But she busies herself with decorating their rooms. Oh, I feel certain she does not lack for diversions."

"And Frank?"

"He has some duties on the estate," answered Anne, "although I cannot say what they entail. His only messages to date have been a few lines added at the end of Jane's letters. We hope to hear more, much more, from both very soon."

Emma's eyes grew wide. "Miss Bates has just learned the news of the Dixons, as you may have heard."

Anne shook her head. "No, we have heard nothing of the sort—good news, I hope?"

"Oh yes, it seems the Dixons will soon welcome a new member to their family."

"Really? Oh, I am so very happy for them both. Jane will certainly be pleased to learn of it. And Frank as well—he became acquainted with both Louisa and Mr. Dixon at Weymouth the summer before last, I believe."

Emma nodded. "I so look forward to seeing the Churchills. Do you have any idea as to when they might visit Highbury next?"

Anne shook her head. "No, I regret to say, I have not. But we are contemplating traveling to Yorkshire ourselves, perhaps in the

spring. That will naturally depend on little Anna being healthy and grown enough to make the journey. It is not an easy trip."

"Indeed," replied Emma, "or so I have been told."

"Perhaps the Knightleys would consider..." began Anne. But her gaze shifted cautiously toward Mr. Woodhouse and she hesitated.

"Emma and Mr. Knightley have traveled quite enough for a lifetime," interjected Mr. Woodhouse with a frown. "Quite enough." The others nodded and smiled.

George then excused himself to attend to estate affairs. A few minutes later as Mr. Woodhouse was nodding off, Emma whispered to Anne, "Shall we visit the conservatory?"

Hartfield's conservatory was a source of special pride to Emma and her father. Exotic orchids, ferns, bromeliads, water plants, fruit trees, cacti, and succulents grew in profusion and the air was laden with the fragrances of lemon and orange blossoms. Emma and Anne strolled among the greenery, then seated themselves on a wooden bench near a small sculpture of Neptune, a stream of water bubbling from his scepter before cascading into a shallow pool in which goldfish swam lazily. The atmosphere was serene and restful.

"Your father seems well, Emma," observed Anne, her affection for the old man evident in her eyes.

"Oh, yes, though he would never admit to it," replied Emma. They both laughed.

"I imagine having all those Knightleys about for a fortnight enlivened Hartfield, to his great benefit and delight."

Emma smiled. "I dare say those five little ones kept the house in constant flux." They both laughed at the thought of those boisterous children running up and down the stairways, along the corridors, inside as well as out of doors.

Emma gazed affectionately upon her friend, then spoke softly: "You and Mr. Weston..." She paused before continuing. "Do you anticipate a large family?"

Anne smiled, but her smile quickly faded. She shook her head slowly. "I am afraid not, Emma." Her eyes glistened. "There was, according to my physician, some internal damage with the birth of

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Anna. No, Emma, we must it seems content ourselves with one child."

Emma was surprised and saddened by this revelation. Emma had been aware at the time that Anne's labour had been long and difficult. And for some days after the baby arrived, Mr. Weston spoke guardedly about the health of his wife. It was a difficult ordeal, but he assured them that she would improve. And so she did, over the coming weeks.

Emma looked into her friend's eyes. "But that child is a darling, is she not?"

"Yes," Anne allowed. "We are very fortunate." She hesitated a moment. "And we have thoughts of adopting a second child, one day."

"Oh, Anne, that would be wonderful, for little Anna to have a sister, or a brother, just wonderful."

"We shall see," added Anne.

Soon the conversation turned to lighter subjects, the village fair, for one, and plans for a sewing circle with several of their mutual friends. At last Anne Weston prepared to depart.

"We would love to welcome you and Mr. Knightley to dine at Randalls sometime soon, Emma. Mr. Weston will be wishing to hear about your time in Sandgate. He lived in Dover for a while, you know."

Emma and Anne returned to the morning room where they found Mr. Woodhouse standing by a window looking out upon the gardens.

"Oh, one household matter I wished to mention," he began. "Hartfield finds itself in need of a scullery maid. Gladys Urwin has had to tender her resignation."

Anne winced. "Oh, dear, I am sorry to hear it. She was a hard worker. But her health has not been good for some time, I recall."

Mr. Woodhouse grimaced. "Her rheumatism has quite discomfited her. I urged her to see Perry but she would not. Her sister, Mrs. Clarke, has kindly agreed to be with us temporarily, until we find a permanent replacement for poor Gladys."

Emma nodded. "I intend to post a letter to Gladys wishing her well. She came to work at Hartfield well before I can recall, did she not?"

Her father nodded in agreement. "Oh, yes, well before your time, my dear."

"Perhaps you know of someone who might be available?" Emma asked.

Anne paused, thinking. Then she shook her head slowly. "I cannot think of a soul. But I will make some inquiries on Hartfield's behalf, if you should wish me to do so."

Emma and her father thanked Anne warmly, then said their goodbyes.

The Churchills Ride Their Curricl



ir Reginald Churchill was a man of vision and enterprise. A native of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, he opened one of the first collieries in that city early in the eighteenth century. A few years later he acquired additional coal mining operations in Sunderland and Durham. Among his innovations was the use of steam power to pump water from the deepest mines, thus greatly increasing their yield.

Within a few decades Sir Reginald had become one of the wealthiest men in England. Because his wife's family hailed from York, the couple decided to make their home in South Yorkshire, at Enscombe House. An imposing structure of stone and brick, Enscombe was one of the largest, most impressive residences in all the north of England with over fifty rooms. Its situation was equally grand, in the midst of a vast estate at the foot of Southby Moor.

Sir Reginald's son eventually sold the family's interests in coal mines, preferring to invest that largesse in several shipping firms based in London and Liverpool. By the time Sir Reginald's grandson, Edwin Churchill, inherited the property, it had been divided into over twenty inholdings, each of which was leased to a farmer. The land was best suited to the grazing of livestock; at one time some fifty thousand head of sheep and cattle were grazed on the Churchills' estate.

Edwin Churchill was not himself a particularly astute businessman, but he had the good sense to employ managers, bailiffs, and overseers who knew their trade. He and his wife had no children of their own. But upon the death of Mrs. Churchill's sister, Margaret Weston, they agreed to adopt Mrs. Churchill's nephew, Frank Weston.

And so Frank Churchill, as he would be known, grew up in the vastness of Enscombe with only a governess for a companion. His adoptive parents provided everything he needed in the way of material goods, but there was a notable lack of those finer qualities

of family life, warmth, tenderness, genuine affection. Mrs. Churchill was plagued with health problems, some real, some imagined, and she employed her infirmities to regulate young Frank's life. Once he was of an age to be out on his own, she frequently and without warning called him home, presumably to assist her. She appeared to be at pains to deprive Frank of regular contact with his real father, Captain Charles Weston of Highbury. For years father and son met only briefly when the Churchills traveled to London. It was not until after his father's marriage to Miss Anne Taylor that Frank visited Mr. and Mrs. Weston at Randalls, their new home in Highbury.

Then twenty-five years of age, Frank had grown into a handsome, affable young man. He quickly became a favourite among a society in Highbury that included Emma Woodhouse, George Knightley, the Bateses, and Jane Fairfax. He showed particular interest in Emma and she in him, the pair sharing intimacies, private jokes, and secrets, often in the presence of Jane. He was at that time already secretly engaged to Jane, although his behaviour would never have suggested such an attachment. It would be an understatement to say that the subsequent announcement of the engagement of Frank and Jane came as a shock to Emma, who had been convinced of Frank's romantic interest, first toward herself, then toward Harriet Smith. Immediately following their wedding the young couple set off for Yorkshire and their new life at Enscombe.



On a bright September afternoon a crimson curricle drawn by a nimble gelding sped along a gravel way in a Yorkshire woodland. The driver, Frank Churchill, and his bride, Jane Churchill, sat high in the double seat, Jane clutching her bonnet with one hand as it was buffeted by the wind. Just then they approached a sharp turn in the road.

"Hold on, Mrs. Churchill," said Frank with a mischievous smile. They rounded the turn, slowing only slightly. Jane screamed with delight as Frank gave his horse the whip and the carriage surged ahead.

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Soon the way ascended onto Southby Moor where it was bordered on both sides by carpets of heather in their autumn finery, leaves of green, red, and orange, alternating with a few taller shrubs, bilberry and leatherleaf. When the road became rough and uneven, Frank permitted some diminution of their forward progress. Finally at a crest he drew the carriage to a halt.

Frank looked upon his bride and smiled. She was, as he had often said, truly an angel, with porcelain skin, eyes of deep gray, and a graceful figure that could not help but please any young man who laid eyes upon her.

"This, Mrs. Churchill, is *our* Yorkshire," he boasted, wrapping one arm around his bride and waving his other hand at the distant panorama. "Over there is Skipton," he said pointing westward, then swinging his arm to the east, "then Ilkley Moor, Burley, and Askwith." Then he turned and gestured to the northwest. "And that is Grassington Moor. It has a variety of curiosities, Jane—stones and alignments of great antiquity. We must plan an excursion there one day—on horseback."

Jane was speechless at all she beheld.

"What do you think?" he asked.

"It is lovely, Frank, just lovely. I had no idea there was such grandeur, such scope, to Yorkshire. I feel I could reach up and touch heaven."

"No need to reach up, my darling—you are already there," he replied. He kissed her, then looked into her eyes. "Are you happy, dearest Jane?"

"Oh, yes, beyond words, Frank. With our new home, with Enscombe, with all this..." She paused, then took his hand in hers. "And of course with my husband." She smiled a shy smile.

Before their marriage, Frank had often wondered if marriage would suit Jane Fairfax. She was, he acknowledged, accomplished and independent, more so in some ways than was he. And he had worried whether Enscombe might prove too isolated for this young woman who had lived most of her childhood in London. He was therefore heartened by her words of praise for her new home and spouse.

"So marriage suits you?"

"It does."

"And Yorkshire—Enscombe—do they suit you, dearest Jane?"

She took his hand, smiling. "Perfectly."

He looked squarely in her eyes. "And would this be a suitable place to raise a family?"

"Oh, darling, children would love this place."

"I mean, would *our* children love it?" Then he corrected himself.

"That is, *will* our children love it?"

She smiled modestly. "Yes, I do believe they—they will, Frank, most assuredly."

Then she paused, thinking. "But what about their education?"

"Well, we shall hire a governess when the time comes," replied Frank.

"I would dearly hope that they might attend a school with other children, at least part of each year. Do you not see merit in that?"

"I suppose. But the nearest school is miles away, Jane, in Halewark."

"I should like to visit it one day. May we?"

Frank shrugged. "It is just a school, Jane, like any other—desks, slates, chalk—little else."

"I know, but Frank, the village school in Highbury, the one that I attended before the Campbells took me to London, was such a wonderful place. I want that for our children. Do you not?"

"Whatever you say, Jane. I for one never set foot in a school, and it has done me no harm." He chuckled. "But that will be your decision, when the time comes." Frank looked into his bride's eyes. "We had better get started, then, don't you think?"

"Do you mean started on our way back to Southby House, or started on our family?"

He gave a mischievous grin and a wink. "Why, both, dearest—both." With that he guided the horse back onto the road, reversed the carriage, then began the descent.

Just as they rounded the turn at the entrance to Southby House, a horseman riding a tall black stallion suddenly appeared, hurtling directly toward their curricula. Frank jerked the reins and his horse

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lunged to the right as the stallion galloped past. The curricule lurched to a halt, one wheel slipping down into a ditch at the road's edge.

Jane had bent forward, grasping the handrail lest she be unseated by the jolt. Frank leaned over and took her arm. "Darling, are you all right?"

She nodded as she straightened herself. But she was clearly shaken. "Who was that, Frank?"

"I am not sure, but whoever he was, he was a fool to ride so recklessly."

Back at Southby House, their cheeks still aglow from their dash through the cool Yorkshire air, Jane and Frank took tea by the fireplace. Frank reached for the post that had arrived while they were out.

"Darling, a letter—from Ireland," said Frank, handing her the envelope. Jane smiled, received it, broke the red wax seal, and settled back in her chair, absorbed with reading the missive from Louisa Dixon.

Meanwhile Frank leafed through the other items. One caught his eye as it bore neither address nor stamp. He opened it. Having read just the first two lines, he reinserted the letter into the envelope and quickly slipped it into his pocket, making sure as he did so that Jane was still distracted by the letter from Ireland. Just then she looked up.

"How are the Dixons?" he inquired.

"Mrs. Dixon is expecting, Frank. I am so happy for them, I must write back this evening."

"But we are due at Enscombe House, Jane, remember? At seven."

Jane nodded. "Yes, of course, I will write the Dixons in the morning, then. Perhaps I will retire for a rest before we depart." She stood and kissed Frank on the head. "Anything else of note in the post?"

Frank seemed abstracted. "Uh, the post? No, nothing really, merely bills and such."

Robert T. McMaster



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