

Part 1

Chapter 1

Emma

Emma's life seemed perfect. She was good-looking, everybody said so. She was clever, she knew that herself. And she was rich: the richest twenty-one-year-old in Highbury, where she lived with her father in the grandest house in the village.

But Emma Woodhouse was lonely. Her mother had died when she was little and it was seven years since her older sister Isabella had married and gone to live with her husband in London. And now Miss Taylor – the young woman who had been employed as Emma's governess and had become her best friend – had also got married. Her new home wasn't far away; Emma could visit every day if she wanted to, but she knew that things would never be the same again. The wedding was over, Miss Taylor was now Mrs Weston, and Emma was alone with her father. Who was asleep.

So she was glad when Mr Knightley arrived. He was a close friend of the family, the brother of Emma's sister's husband, and Emma was always pleased to see him, although he was nearly thirty-seven. Mr Woodhouse woke up and immediately started to talk about the wedding.

'Poor Miss Taylor! 'Tis a sad business.'

Emma's father hated change and couldn't understand why everyone else didn't hate it too. Why did Miss Taylor have to go and get married when she could have stayed with him and Emma at Hartfield House forever? It made no sense!

Mr Knightley smiled. 'Poor Miss Taylor? Poor Mr and Miss Woodhouse, if you please!'

'Yes, indeed, Mr Knightley. Dear Emma will be very sorry to lose poor Miss Taylor,' her father agreed. 'She will miss her more than she thinks.'

Emma turned her face away, caught between smiles and tears.

'I'm sure that is true, sir,' said Mr Knightley, with a quick glance at Emma. 'But Emma must be as glad as all of us to see Miss Taylor so happily married.'

'And you have forgotten one matter of joy to me,' said Emma, forcing herself to smile. 'I made the match myself!'

Mr Knightley shook his head at her.

'Everybody said Mr Weston would never marry again,' she continued. 'It was such a long time since his first wife died and he seemed so content to be single. But I did not believe it. Ever since the day four years ago when Miss Taylor and I met him in the village and he rushed away and borrowed umbrellas for us the moment it started to rain – I made up my mind: Miss Taylor and Mr Weston were going to be married!'

'You made a lucky guess,'
said Mr Knightley.

'That is all.'

Emma smiled. 'And
have you never known
the pleasure of a lucky
guess, Mr Knightley?
I pity you!'



'Emma never thinks
of herself, if she can do good for others,' said Mr
Woodhouse, vaguely. 'But, my dear, pray do not make any
more matches. They are silly things and break up one's
family circle grievously.'

'Only one more, Papa.' Emma looked at them both.
'Mr Elton!'

Mr Elton was the new vicar of Highbury. He was very
young, very popular and very good-looking.

'I made up my mind when I saw him at the church
today. That man has been single long enough, Papa. He
needs a wife!'

Mr Knightley laughed. 'Invite him to dinner, Emma,'
he said. 'Serve him the best fish and chicken. But leave the
man to choose his own wife.'

Emma smiled and said nothing. She didn't need to.
She had, as she said, made up her mind.

All she had to do now was to find the right young lady.