

INT. EMMA'S DRESSING ROOM AT HARTFIELD - THE NEXT DAY - DAY35

Emma, in her dressing room, is being fitted for a winter coat by the haberdasher MRS FORD. Emma is wearing a mock-up, and Mrs Ford is busily altering the garment to fit.

The door opens and Harriet bursts in, carrying a letter.

HARRIET

Miss Woodhouse- you will never guess what has happened- Robert

Martin has offered me his hand!

(then, suddenly)

Hic.

She is so breathless with excitement that she has given herself the hiccups. She rushes on, fumbling with the letter

HARRIET (CONT'D)

He writes as if he really loves me very much. Hic. I came as fast as I could to ask you what I should do.

Hic.

Mrs Ford glances at her quickly, and then resumes work on Emma's hem. Harriet is now comfortable enough at Hartfield not to pay attention to the servants, and doesn't notice. She comes forward, holding out the letter

HARRIET (CONT'D)

Will you read it? Hic.

EMMA

Take a deep breath and hold it.

Harriet obliges.

Emma begins to read the letter. A long beat, and then Harriet exhales noisily to ask

HARRIET

(anxiously)

Is it a good letter? Or too short?

It is, in fact, a good letter. Emma is surprised.

EMMA

A very good letter- so good, that I think one of his sisters must have helped him.

HARRIET
What shall I do? Hic.

EMMA
Hold your nose.

HARRIET
(holding her nose)
About the letter.

EMMA
You must answer it, of course.

HARRIET
But what shall I say? Dear Miss Woodhouse, do advise me.

EMMA
(handing back the letter)
Oh, no, no! The words must be your own. But you must be unequivocal. You must express gratitude, concern for the pain you are inflicting, and sorrow for his disappointment.

She takes off the mocked-up coat and hands it to Mrs Ford, who curtseys and withdraws, glancing at Harriet dubiously as she does so. Harriet's hiccups seem to have subsided.

HARRIET
You think I ought to refuse him.

EMMA
My dear Harriet, what do you mean? Are you in any doubt as to that?

HARRIET
I...I had no notion that he liked me so very much. Hic.

EMMA

I lay it down as a general rule, Harriet, that if a woman doubts as to whether she should accept a man or not, she certainly ought to refuse him. But do not imagine that I want to influence you.

HARRIET

Hic... Perhaps... it will be safer... Do you think I had better say 'No'? Hic.

EMMA

Not for the world would I advise you either way. You must be the best judge of your own happiness. If you prefer Mr Martin to every other person; if you think him the most agreeable man you have ever met, why should you hesitate?

HARRIET

I have now quite determined, and really almost made up my mind—
(tiny beat)
—to refuse Mr Martin. Do you think I am right? Hic.

EMMA

(with great relief)
Perfectly, perfectly right, dear Harriet. While you were all in suspense I kept my feelings to myself, but now that you are decided, I have no hesitation in approving. I give myself joy of this. It would have grieved me to lose you. I could not have visited Mrs Robert Martin, of Abbey-Mill Farm!

HARRIET

You could not have visited me!

The horror of this prospect has frightened the hiccups away.

EMMA

It would have been a severe pang to lose your acquaintance, but so it must have been. You would have thrown yourself out of all good society. I must have given you up.

(beat- then, pleased)

There. They've subsided.