***Emma***

***Chapter 32***

***Vol2Chapter14***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

Mr. Elton is finally married and it comes time for Emma to meet the new Mrs. Elton. She brings Harriet along to make it easier to get out of the way and they call on the newlyweds. Mr. Elton acts a little strangely, which is not to be unexpected, and Emma doesn't have much chance to form an opinion of Mrs. Elton.

Harriet seems quite at ease now that she has met and approved of Mrs. Elton. She resolves not to sign after him again, knowing that he married well and is happy.

Mr. And Mrs. Elton call on Emma and her father and she is at last allowed to form an opinion on Mrs. Elton. Emma considers Mrs. Elton vulgar, rude and completely insufferable. Mrs. Elton refers to everyone with great familiarity, such as calling her husband Mr. E and referring to Mr. Knightley as just Knightley. Emma is completely appalled and cannot wait for the visit to end.

[Mr. Elton](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Elton) returns to Highbury a married man, and Emma is obliged to pay a social call, taking Harriet along to get the first awkward visit out of the way. Emma immediately has a bad impression of the bride but reserves judgment. When the bride pays a visit to Hartfield, Emma confirms that Mrs. Elton is "a vain woman, extremely well satisfied with herself, and thinking much of her own importance." Mrs. Elton brags about her rich brother-in-law, Mr. Suckling, who has a country seat very like Hartfield, she says, and a barouche-landau, the Cadillac of carriages. Mrs. Elton begins dispensing unsolicited advice, such as that [Mr. Woodhouse](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Woodhouse) should try Bath to improve his health and that Emma should accompany him so that she may be introduced to Mrs. Elton's acquaintance. Emma is also annoyed by Mrs. Elton's condescending appraisals of the Hartfield gentry, and by the end of the evening she pronounces the woman "insufferable."

***Analysis:***

The narrator seems to dislike Mrs. Elton as much as Emma does, leaving the reader with the feeling that Mrs. Elton truly is a vulgar woman. Harriet will now hopefully have some peace of mind knowing that Mr. Elton is married and seems happy. How long this peace of mind will last will most likely depend on how quickly Mr. Churchill returns and if Emma continues her matchmaking pursuits.

***Detailed Summary(31-32):***

Emma continues "to entertain no doubt of her being in love" with Frank, but "the conclusion of every imaginary declaration on his side was that she refused him." Though she is certain that he is in love, she begins to suspect that he is not really necessary to her happiness. When she reads a letter that Mrs. Weston receives from Frank, she still finds that she can "do without the writer"; but struck by a reference in the letter to her "beautiful little friend" Harriet, she begins to think of scheming.

Now that Frank is gone, the center of attention becomes the expected arrival of the Eltons. Harriet is in such a flutter about this that Emma, to divert her friend for her good, reproaches her for not thinking of Emma and the pain that the constant reference to the Eltons causes her. Harriet reacts with such concern that Emma later muses on her tenderness of heart and wifely possibilities, concluding thus: "I mention no names; but happy the man who changes Emma for Harriet!"

Mrs. Elton is first seen at church, but not long afterward Emma, taking Harriet to get the confrontation over with, pays the newlyweds a short visit. Emma feels that she sees in Augusta Elton not much elegance but too much ease for a young woman who is both a bride and a stranger. When the visit is returned, she becomes convinced that Augusta is "a vain woman," for she talks too much about her "brother Mr. Suckling's seat" of Maple Grove and about his barouche-landau, which they use for "exploring." She is overly familiar with her recommendation of the "advantages of Bath" for Mr. Woodhouse; then after denying any real ability with music, she insists that she and Emma, as town leaders, must form a musical society. Revealing that they have been calling at Randalls, she offers hasty, brief praise of the Westons and refers to another visitor there as Knightley, whom she has then met for the first time.

After the Eltons are gone, Emma inwardly expresses her outrage at this "insufferable woman" who, having never seen George before, glibly calls him Knightley. The woman is worse than she has imagined. When Mr. Woodhouse states that he should have paid his respects to Augusta because "Not to wait upon a bride is very remiss," Emma chides him as no friend to matrimony and states that what he says he should have done is "encouragement to marry." He wants to argue the point, but Emma drops it, her mind returning "to Mrs. Elton's offences, and long, very long, did they occupy her."

***Detailed Analysis(31-32):***

Something close to reversal begins to occur in these two chapters. Emma obviously has not ended her propensity to manage others and can even shift her own feelings for Frank into another possible "management" for Harriet. Marriage, of course, is still the focal point for her scheming. Now a new character, Augusta Elton, is introduced as one who also likes to manage things. In a sense Augusta combines the worst characteristics of both Emma and Miss Bates. Like Miss Bates, she is an inveterate and domineering talker; but unlike the spinster, she seems lacking in genuine goodwill and in any compensating self-effacement. Like Emma, she has an overriding urge to manage; but unlike her new acquaintance, she obviously is wanting in good breeding and taste and apparently is ready to pass judgment on and manage any and everything that comes into view. We are never told directly that Emma sees something of herself in Augusta; but the rector's new wife will be another major factor in Emma's gradual maturing into self-knowledge, for Augusta is a flagrant example of how far one can go in self-importance and in "management."At the moment, concentrating upon the vulgar reference to George as Knightley, Emma can analyze the newcomer only to the point of calling her an insufferable woman because she is crude and brash.

At this point in the story Emma is beginning to get over another crisis: her feeling that she is in love with Frank Churchill. The practical and reasoning side of her nature is starting to reassert itself. Interestingly enough Augusta, in addition to being a revelatory foil for Emma, serves her in another psychological way. Since something or someone is needed to replace the diminishing personal significance of Frank, Augusta will allow her vent for both emotion and reaction. The "insufferable woman" helps her get over the involvement — such as it is — with Frank.

***Critical Study:***

Emma first sees the new Mrs. Elton at church, but she cannot be in the vicinity of the Eltons without recollecting Mr. Elton’s bad behavior and Emma’s meddling. Emma finds that Mrs. Elton has no elegance and maintains that Harriet would have been a better wife for Mr. Elton because of her higher social connections. When Emma meets with Mrs. Elton, she compares Hartfield to Maple Grove, where her brother resides, and is quite presumptuous, calling Mrs. Weston surprisingly ladylike considering her former occupation. She even calls Mr. Knightley the much less formal "Knightley."

In Augusta Hawkins, Mr. Elton has found a perfect match: a woman as vapid and socially conscious as he is. The new Mrs. Elton drops names, constantly offers her own superiority, and treats the members of Highbury society with much less respect than normally accorded. The woman is self-important, ignorant, and ill-bred, with none of the talents that could redeem her as they did Jane Fairfax. As bad as the new Mrs. Elton's manners are, they are made worse by her position in society. Her snobbery and comparisons of Hartfield to Maple Grove are made worse by the fact that her connections in Maple Grove are wealthy but lower class. This perpetuates the theme that social class determines proper manners; Mrs. Elton does not know her proper rank in society.

Calling Mr. Knightley by his last name is a particular affront to propriety, for it presumes equality and intimacy between the two, neither of which is the case. Even Emma and her father speak of their close friend as Mr. Knightley, despite their long acquaintance and equal social status. Assuming that the character names reflect Emma's point of view, there are only a few times when a less formal name is used: between close friends of the same age, between siblings or by an adult to a child, or with regard to an unmarried woman.

***Summary part by part and analysis***

***Summary part 1:***

[Mrs. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) arrives, and [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) resolves to pay her respects with [Harriet](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters). The visit results in unpleasant recollections and awkwardness from [Mr. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters), but Emma refrains from judging Mrs. Elton too soon, though she leaves with the impression that Mrs. Elton is unimpressive.

***Analysis part 1:***

Emma, with somewhat surprising fairness, reserves her judgment the first time that she meets Mrs. Elton.

***Summary part 2:***

[Mrs. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters)’s following visit to Hartfield, however, convinces Emma that the new bride is a vain and self-important woman. Mrs. Elton displays many of the gauche superficialities of the nouveau-riche. Mrs. Elton’s over-familiarity particularly offends Emma; Mrs. Elton proposes they start a musical club together as though they were already intimate friends, and she further provokes Emma by presumptively referring to [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley) as “Knightley.” Emma also finds Mrs. Elton’s offer to help her make social connections outrageous.

***Analysis part 2***

Mrs. Elton quickly gains Emma’s ill-opinion, however, by not only displaying her own self-importance but also offending Emma’s. By presuming such familiarity with Emma and the neighbors, Mrs. Elton behaves as though she were on equal footing with Emma and Mr. Knightley. Indeed, Mrs. Elton’s offer to socially introduce Emma to her friends presumes that she possesses certain advantages over Emma, which is both presumptuous and false.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) concludes that [Mrs. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) is insufferable and vulgar, with many pretensions but little real grace. She feels [Harriet](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters), for all her lack of refinement, is much her superior. [Mr. Woodhouse](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-woodhouse), however, only complacently observes that Mrs. Elton seems a nice young lady. He remarks that a bride holds a particularly special rank in society, the “first in company.”

***Analysis Part 3:***

Exactly what marks any given individual at the top of the social ladder can be quite confusing. Social connections and wealth, manners and virtue . . . there seems a fine line between real elegance and pretentious airs, and it requires considerable discernment to mark out real superiority.