***Emma***

***Chapter 33***

***Vol2Chapter15***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

As Mrs. Elton settles in at Highbury, the battle lines between her and Emma are beginning to form. She treats Harriet with much disdain and seems to enjoy harassing both girls. Mrs. Elton begins to form a close friendship with Miss Fairfax.

This friendship is discussed by Mrs. Weston, Emma and Mr. Knightley while Emma attempts to find out just how much Mr. Knightley cares about Miss Fairfax. Mr. Knightley disavows any affection on his part and reveals that Mr. Cole asked him the exact same thing.

After Mr. Knightley leaves, Emma triumphantly tells Mrs. Weston that she was right all along; Mr. Knightley does not love Miss Fairfax. Mrs. Weston replies that she thinks Mr. Knightley is too busy convincing himself of this fact to realize that he really is in love with Miss Fairfax.

Emma continues to dislike the Eltons, and they return the favor, venting their animosity by treating Harriet poorly. After being rebuffed by Emma, Mrs. Elton attaches herself to Jane as a self-appointed mentor. "I am a great advocate for timidity," Mrs. Elton says.

Emma, Mrs. Weston, and [Mr. Knightley](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Knightley) speculate about why Jane has accepted the attentions of the odious Mrs. Elton. In the course of the conversation, Mr. Knightley's admiration of Jane is evident, and Emma remarks on it. At first he thinks she is trying to match him with Jane, and he tells Emma that Jane is not his type because she is too reserved. Emma "could not but rejoice to hear that [Jane] had a fault." Mrs. Weston, however, remains unconvinced by his denials.

Emma finds nothing to change her ill opinion of Augusta; in fact, while Mr. Elton appears happy and even proud of his wife, she alters her feelings toward Emma and becomes quite unpleasant toward Harriet. She takes a great fancy to Jane Fairfax and declares she will "help" her. What surprises Emma is that Jane tolerates and accepts the woman's attentions.

When Jane gets another invitation to join the Campbells in Ireland and declines, Emma feels that she "must have some motive, more powerful than appears, for refusing." Mrs. Weston and George

suggest that Jane lets the Eltons entertain her because she must at times get away from the Bates household. This is Emma's opportunity to press George about how highly he regards Jane; but brought to the point, he assures her that he will never ask Jane to marry him, saying that she has the fault of lacking an open temper in spite of her other virtues. Emma feels that she has won her argument on this with Mrs. Weston, but the latter is not so certain.

Emma continues to dislike Mrs. Elton, who, noting Emma’s reserve, begins to return the sentiment. Emma assumes that Mr. Elton has told his wife something of the unfortunate episode with her and Harriet, to whom the Eltons are especially rude. Mrs. Elton takes on Jane Fairfax as her project, attempting to bring her out socially. Emma is puzzled that Jane refuses another invitation to join Mr. and Mrs. Campbell and Mr. and Mrs. Dixon in Ireland. She is also puzzled that Jane accepts Mrs. Elton’s attentions, and she discusses Jane’s actions with Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley. Mr. Knightley defends Jane’s acceptance of Mrs. Elton’s attentions, and Emma takes the opportunity to probe Mr. Knightley on his feelings for Jane, telling him, “The extent of your admiration may take you by surprise one day or other.” Knightley seems flustered, uneasy, and embarrassed and wonders whether Emma has been playing matchmaker for him. She assures him that she has not, and he insists her that he is not in love with Jane—for one thing, Jane is too reserved. Emma is satisfied that she has been right about Knightley’s feelings for Jane and that Mrs. Weston has been wrong, but Mrs. Weston wonders if his eagerness in denying it indicates otherwise.

***Analysis:***

The lines of demarcation are being drawn and it seems that while Mrs. Elton and Emma may certainly not look like enemies in public, they certainly are becoming so in private.

The Elton's treatment of Harriet is considered shameful, but Emma does hope it will result in Harriet finally letting go of Mr. Elton and her attachment to him.

Again, we are left to wonder if Emma is being honest in her reasons for wanting Mr. Knightley not to marry Miss Fairfax.

Though Emma is not consciously aware of it, she is getting a rather good dose of comeuppance from the "managing" Mrs. Elton, and more is to come. Otherwise, so far as Emma is concerned, two elements of plot movement develop here: George's supposed interest in Jane is clarified, while the puzzle of Jane itself continues and is augmented by Jane's toleration of Mrs. Elton.

***Analysis(32-33):***

Emma shows some maturity in not holding a grudge against [Mr. Elton](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Elton) over their mutual misunderstanding. She is ready to begin with a clean slate, and though she initially has a bad impression of the vicar's new wife, she resolves to give her a chance. Mrs. Elton is so thoroughly obnoxious, however, that Emma pulls back from extending her friendship. Some critics have identified Mrs. Elton as a caricature of Emma. She is a more extreme version of Emma's snobbery and condescension, although she lacks what [Mr. Knightley](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Knightley) will later call Emma's "serious" side, a depth of character that has not been well-developed, because of her faulty upbringing.

Mrs. Elton is a comic figure; she, who is so overbearing, claims to be a great admirer of timidity. She drops a reference to her sister's barouche landau into as many sentences as possible to remind people how rich her sister's husband is. Meanwhile, his name is Mr. Suckling, and the reader cannot but think of a suckling pig every time she mentions him.

When Emma's friends puzzle over why Jane has accepted Mrs. Elton's friendship, Mrs. Weston mentions that her aunt must become very tiresome after a while, and Mr. Knightley indirectly reproaches Emma by saying that Jane doesn't have a lot of friends to choose from. Emma is not completely convinced that Mr. Knightley is uninterested in Jane, and she asks him point blank. At first he is embarrassed because he thinks she is up to her old matchmaking tricks, but when it becomes apparent it is a real question that touches upon her feelings, he straightforwardly tells her he has no interest. This is in keeping with Mr. Knightley's upright nature. It would not occur to him to try to make Emma jealous by feigning affection for someone else.

***Analysis(31-33):***

In these chapters, Emma’s imaginative preoccupations again shift their focus from meddling in others’ lives to understanding the intrigue in her own. Earlier in the novel, Emma occupies herself by envisaging Jane Fairfax’s supposed affair with Mr. Dixon, but Jane’s reserve and Emma’s growing compassion for her have made this line of speculation less worthwhile for Emma; now, for the first time in the novel, Emma imagines herself as the heroine of her own plot. Even so, her sentiments for Frank Churchill are no more real than the feelings that she wrongly attributes to Mr. Elton, Jane, and Mr. Knightley. Notably, her feelings for Frank flourish only in his absence, which leaves Emma not unhappy but “busy and cheerful.” She relishes the chance to envision her and Frank’s courtship, picturing “a thousand amusing schemes for the progress and close of their attachment, fancying interesting dialogues, and inventing elegant letters.” She does not seem to relish the prospect of a courtship itself.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Elton seems like a crude parody of the earlier Emma, exhibiting Emma’s mistakes in an exaggerated form. Mrs. Elton is constantly in search of young women to whom she can attach herself and introduce into her society, and she holds matchmaking an important goal. Emma immediately resents Mrs. Elton’s presumptuousness in thinking she can make matches between strangers, and Mrs. Elton’s blunt, outspoken nature makes us share Emma’s resentment. Still, no great difference exists between Mrs. Elton’s behavior toward Jane and Emma’s behavior toward Harriet, though Emma herself cannot recognize the similarity. Both Emma and Mrs. Elton are guilty of presumption.

The conversation Emma and Mrs. Weston have with Knightley presents another example of a dialogue with a subtext that can be understood only upon a second reading of the novel. Knightley is obviously uncomfortable when Emma suggests that he has feelings for Jane, and his uneasy reaction could be interpreted a number of ways. Knightley may flush simply because he resents personal questions, or because, as Mrs. Weston suspects, he is fighting or concealing his feelings for Jane. We suspect that he flushes because he is displeased that Emma so blithely imagines him with someone else, and he seems relieved when she assures him that this has not been the case. Mrs. Weston’s willingness to read between the lines and have faith in Knightley’s refutation at the end of the chapter reinforces the novel’s message that seeking subtexts can alert one to a hidden truth but can just as easily lead one into error.

***Critical Study:***

Mrs. Elton, offended by the little encouragement given by Emma, become cold and distant to her. Her manners, and those of Mr. Elton, also become more unpleasant toward Harriet. Mrs. Elton does, however, take a great fancy to Jane Fairfax, a fact which causes Emma to pity Jane for the first time. Jane refuses an invitation to join the Campbells, and Emma suspects that she has some ulterior motive. Mrs. Weston predicts that Mr. Knightley has spent so much time occupied with the idea of not being in love with Jane Fairfax that he will probably end in marrying her.

Emma is quite decisive about whom she likes and dislikes, and once she decides that she dislikes Mrs. Elton, there is little chance that she will substantially alter this opinion. In only one respect does her low opinion of Mrs. Elton change: it becomes worse. Once again status plays a consideration. Emma dislikes Mrs. Elton because she presumes herself to be higher in society than she actually is, believing that her connections at Maple Grove make her quite respectable. Yet part of this dislike stems from Mrs. Elton's apparent mutual dislike of Emma.

While Emma is invariably polite to Mrs. Elton, as she is to nearly all, the bitterness between the two women indicates that manners can only obscure so much. Despite Emma's outward propriety, Mrs. Elton can sense that Emma dislikes her and the victim of her animosity is none other than poor Harriet Smith. Although Mrs. Elton cannot openly scorn Emma, she can openly treat the lowly Harriet Smith with contempt.

However, the polite feud between Emma and Mrs. Elton does serve to show that Emma herself has harmed others socially. It is Mr. Knightley who reminds Emma that Jane Fairfax has become friends with Mrs. Elton primarily because only Mrs. Elton pays attention to Jane. This implies that Jane Fairfax is somewhat of an outcast in society, likely because Emma has made this the case. Just as Mrs. Elton certainly sensed Emma's dislike of her, others in Highbury society likely realize that Emma dislikes Jane Fairfax and follow her lead. Jane Fairfax is a victim because of Emma's envy.

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

***Summary part 1:***

Further encounters with [Mrs. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) confirm [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse)’s poor opinion of her. In response, Mrs. Elton observes Emma’s reserve and grows colder towards her. She pours out affection on [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/jane-fairfax) instead, whom she socially takes under her wing. To Emma’s surprise, Jane seems to accept and tolerate Mrs. Elton’s behavior.

***Analysis part 1:***

Mrs. Elton’s desire to take Jane under her wing parallels Emma’s own relationship with Harriet. For all their mutual dislike of each other, both women are full of their own importance and charity, though the novel does present Emma as having a certain grace that Mrs. Elton distinctly lacks. In some ways, Mrs. Elton is like a coarse double of Emma, showing what Emma might have been had she lacked all her other blessings and her willingness to self-examine and change her own behavior.

***Summary part 2:***

[Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/jane-fairfax) receives a second invitation to join the Dixons in Ireland, but she declines and decides to stay in Highbury. [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) suspects Jane must be punishing herself regarding her feelings for [Mr. Dixon](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters).

***Analysis part 2***

Emma continues to interpret the puzzle of Jane according to her own fancy, even as Jane’s real motives remain mysterious to the reader.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Mrs. Weston](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters), [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse), and [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley) discuss [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/jane-fairfax)’s complaisance towards [Mrs. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters)’s attentions. When Mr. Knightley warmly defends Jane’s judgment, Emma teases him about the extent of his admiration for Jane. Mr. Knightley colors, but he believes Jane would never have him and makes it clear that he has no romantic interest in her. Despite his great admiration for her, he finds her too reserved. Emma quietly rejoices—both in Mr. Knightley’s security, and in the acknowledged flaw.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Emma’s concern that Mr. Knightley remain her single friend stems from the compound desire to keep her friend to herself and jealousy of Jane. However, Mr. Knightley demonstrates that he is perfectly capable of holding a disinterested and selfless regard for that which he deems good and beautiful, without any personal claims or pride involved.