***Emma***

***Chapter 38***

***Vol3Chapter2***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

The long awaited ball at Crown's finally arrives and everyone is excited. Emma arrives early at Mrs. Weston's request. The Eltons arrive and Mrs. Elton proceeds to take over the party, removing Emma from her place.

Mr. Churchill is acting quite odd, and keeps waiting for more carriages to arrive. Miss Bates and Miss Fairfax arrive and he makes sure that they do not get wet in the rain that has suddenly begun.

Mrs. Elton dances the first two dances with Mr. Churchill, which were intended to be for Emma. Emma later asks his opinion of Mrs. Elton and he apparently does not like her. Everyone is dancing except Harriet, Mr. Elton and Mr. Knightley. Mrs. Weston asks Mr. Elton if he would like to dance and since Harriet is not dancing, that they should dance together. He mortifies Harriet by refusing and states that he is a married man. A gleeful look passes between Mr. And Mrs. Elton. Mr. Knightley then asks Harriet to dance to remove some of the sting of the refusal.

Supper is served and Emma does have not a chance to speak with Mr. Knightley until it is finished. She invites him over to speak with her and they discuss the behavior of the Eltons. Finally, Emma gets Mr. Knightley to ask her to dance and the chapter ends with both of them taking the floor.

***Analysis:***

The rudeness of Mrs. Bates seems to shock the narrator of the story. The refusal of Mr. Elton to dance with Harriet almost seems planned, and it appears that the Eltons are now sworn enemies, not only of Harriet but also of Emma.

Mr. Knightley picks up on this and questions Emma about it but she does not supply any additional information. This behavior was quite common in this time, as people did not discuss private matters unless they were with sworn confidants.

Emma seems to be quite attracted to Mr. Knightley and compares everyone in the room to him. The only one who can compare is Mr. Churchill and Emma wishes that he liked him more. The reader is now left to wonder if Emma's previous assertions that Mr. Knightley must not marry Miss Fairfax are grounded in her own affection for him.

***Detailed Summary:***

The day of the ball arrives. Emma is invited by Mr. Weston to come early and give her opinion on the arrangements, and she believes that this opportunity will give some privacy to her second meeting with Frank, who will be with his father. But Emma is not the only one of Mr. Weston’s “favourites” that he has entreated to come early, and all the while Frank seems excited but restless, constantly moving to see who has arrived. Finally, when Jane and Miss Bates arrive, Frank rushes out to help them with umbrellas. Mrs. Elton pronounces Frank a very fine young man. Miss Bates overwhelms everyone with exclamations of gratitude and pleasure. Frank tells Emma that he dislikes Mrs. Elton and her familiar manner with Jane, and he runs off again to ask his father when the dancing will begin.

Mr. and Mrs. Weston suddenly realize that Mrs. Elton expects to be asked to lead the dance and that they cannot give Emma that honor, as they had hoped. Despite this slight disappointment, Emma enjoys the beginning of the festivities, though she is disturbed that Mr. Knightley will not dance. She admires the figure he cuts among the other men, and he notices that he is watching her. The ball is a success, and only one episode mars Emma’s enjoyment. During one dance, Harriet is left without a partner, and Mr. Elton, the one dancer who is disengaged, pointedly refuses to ask her. Mr. Knightley soothes Harriet’s embarrassment by asking her to dance, and Emma is very pleased with him. Later, she expresses her gratitude, and he asks her why the Eltons are her enemies. She admits that she wanted Mr. Elton to marry Harriet and acknowledges that Knightley was right about his character. Knightley in return admits that Harriet has more admirable qualities than he originally thought. Emma and Knightley cement their new mutual understanding with a dance.

* In which the Westons have a ball:
* Mr. Weston particularly asks Emma to arrive at the ball early.
* As a close, close friend, he wants her to look over the arrangements before the ball starts.
* Once Emma arrives, however, she realizes that Mr. Weston seems to have many close, close friends. Just about everybody she knows shows up a few hours early to "inspect" the ballroom.
* Despite the early start, everyone has a wonderful time at the ball.
* Mrs. Elton had arranged to bring Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax in her carriage, but she apparently forgot.
* There’s a bit of a hubbub as Mr. Weston and Mrs. Elton try to figure out whose carriage should be sent to collect them.
* As the host, Mr. Weston argues that his carriage should be sent; as Jane’s "special" friend, Mrs. Elton thinks that she has the right to take care of the Bateses.
* Mrs. Elton wins.
* Typically, a hostess greets all the guests as they arrive. Of course, Mrs. Elton seems to think that it’s as much her party as the Westons’. She stands on the other side of Mrs. Weston to greet the guests.
* Emma and Frank make fun of Mrs. Elton from a distance.
* Miss Bates and Jane enter.
* Miss Bates has lots and lots of news about everything that happened to everybody in Highbury that day. She proceeds to tell all of it.
* Mrs. Elton loudly remarks that she "approves" of Frank Churchill. Frank pretends to ignore her, continuing to spend time with Emma.
* Emma sarcastically remarks that Frank should be grateful for Mrs. Elton’s close friendship with Jane. Frank seems startled and gasps for a bit.
* Emma can’t understand his response, but she finally decides that he was just laughing with her.
* Dancing is the main attraction of any ball. Frank asks Emma to be his partner for the first dances (which Mrs. Elton takes as a slight).
* Luckily, Mr. Weston asks Mrs. Elton to dance.
* As the music begins, Emma catches sight of Mr. Elton prowling on the boundaries of the room.
* She watches as he walks up to Mrs. Weston and asks her to dance.
* Mrs. Weston declines, but suggests that he should ask any one of the single young ladies to dance – she points out Harriet as one such lady.
* Mr. Elton immediately backs away, muttering something about being an old married man.
* Emma and Harriet overhear all of this conversation. Emma watches in dismay as Mrs. Elton exchanges smug looks with her husband.
* Immediately after this, Mr. Knightley (who overhead the exchange, as well) asks Harriet to dance.
* Harriet goes from tearful to blissful in a few seconds.
* Emma, watching the whole encounter, casts Mr. Knightley many grateful looks.
* She also notices that he’s a pretty fine dancer.
* Later, during dinner, Mr. Knightley catches up with Emma and asks her why the Eltons seemed so willing to consciously hurt Harriet.
* As he observes, it seems to have something to do with Emma.
* Emma ignores this point.
* Mr. Knightley also tells Emma that he was astonished to find out how lovely and simple Harriet actually is.
* OK, he knew she wasn’t all that bright – but after dancing with her, he doesn’t think that she’s all that bad, either. She’s infinitely better than that cat, Mrs. Elton!
* The music begins again. Looking around, Mr. Knightley asks Emma who she plans to dance with.
* She declares that she intends to dance with him.
* As they begin to dance, Emma observes that she and Mr. Knightley aren’t *really* like a brother and sister. It won’t be like *Flowers in the Attic* if they decide to dance.
* Mr. Knightley agrees. (Perhaps a bit too emphatically…)

***Critical Study:***

Frank Churchill behaves oddly towards Emma at the ball at the Crown Inn. During the first dance, Emma and Frank dance second to Mr. Weston and Mrs. Elton, and Mrs. Elton is completely gratified by this. Emma wishes that she could like Frank better than she actually does. When Mrs. Weston encourages Mr. Elton to dance with Harriet, he blatantly refuses, much to Harriet’s humiliation. To recover Harriet's dignity, Mr. Knightley asks her to dance. After the ball, Mr. Knightley tells Emma that the Eltons' intention was to wound both Emma and Harriet. They cannot forgive her for wanting Harriet to marry Mr. Elton.

Although Emma enjoys Frank Churchill's company and his attention during the Crown Inn ball, this is the extent of her feelings. The only regret she feels is that she cannot feel more towards him. The two can now be completely comfortable with each other's company. Nevertheless, all is not right with Frank Churchill. He is in an uncharacteristically bad mood during the ball, yet the reason remains as yet unclear.

The Eltons' actions in this chapter continue to develop the theme of propriety and the difference between overt behavior and subtle signals. Mr. Elton does not do anything outwardly rude toward Harriet, but it is clear that he intends to snub and humiliate her. The Eltons hide behind the façade of propriety, but their behavior is anything but well-mannered. It is important that Harriet is the victim of the snub rather than Emma because she is an easy target. They can snub the socially inferior Harriet with few consequences, but a similar snub against Emma could not be tolerated.

In rescuing [Harriet Smith](https://www.gradesaver.com/emma/study-guide/character-list#harriet-smith) from humiliation, Mr. Knightley is the paragon of behavior for Emma. For the first time he exhibits a change of behavior toward Harriet: he admits her positive qualities and takes pity on her situation. This is not the only change in Mr. Knightley: his feelings toward Emma become more clear. He dismisses the idea that Emma and he are like siblings, giving greater indication of possible romantic feelings.

On the day of the ball, Mrs. Elton claims the privilege of leading in the dancers with Mr. Weston. [Mr. Knightley](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Knightley) stands aside, not dancing, and as Emma watches him from the floor, the narrator says, "His tall, firm, upright figure ... was such as Emma felt must draw every body's eyes; and, excepting her own partner, there was not one among the whole row of young men who could be compared to him." At one point, Harriet is without a partner, and Mrs. Weston sees [Mr. Elton](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Elton) free and urges him to ask her to dance. Mr. Elton deliberately snubs Harriet, but Mr. Knightley comes to her rescue by dancing with her. Emma and Harriet are both grateful. Later, Mr. Knightley reminds Emma that she wanted Mr. Elton to marry her friend. Emma says, "Does my vain spirit ever tell me I am wrong?" Mr. Knightley answers that her serious spirit keeps her on track. He also allows that "Harriet has some first-rate qualities which Mrs. Elton is totally without." Then the two dance together.

***Analysis(ch37-38 OR vol3ch1-2):***

When Frank returns to Highbury he is more subdued, probably because he is feeling some frustration about his relationship with Jane, which he is still hiding from his relatives and the world. Perhaps he also realized, during his last leave-taking, that Emma could have misconstrued his attentions, so he is being more careful. This may be why Emma perceives him as being "less in love" with her. On her side, enough time has passed (two months) for her to return to normal. A flirtation is fun and raises a person's self-esteem, but she knows she is not in love. Yet she senses some crisis is brewing—she just doesn't know from what quarter it will come.

Emma is slowly coming to terms with her feelings for [Mr. Knightley](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Knightley). He smiles at her whenever he catches her eye, and the non-verbal communication that passes between them shows how much they are in sympathy. When Emma speaks to Mr. Knightley after supper, he asks her why the Eltons are her enemy, and when she makes no answer, it is clear that he can guess why. In the course of their conversation, Emma admits how wrong she was about [Mr. Elton](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Elton), and Mr. Knightley admits that Harriet is a better woman than he gave her credit for. Emma points out that they are not brother and sister and they ought to dance, which indicates that Mr. Knightley is changing categories in her mind.

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

***Summary part 1:***

Emma arrives early to the ball at the special invitation of [Mr. Weston](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters), only to discover that he has also extended this flattering invitation to several other “favored” friends. She considers that such general favoritism is not particularly flattering.

***Analysis part 1:***

Emma’s vanity and consciousness regarding social privileges is piqued by the fact that her special invitation is shared by so many of Mr. Weston’s other friends.

***Summary part 2:***

[Frank](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill) restlessly awaits the guests, and he runs out to escort [Miss Bates](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) and [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/jane-fairfax). [Mrs. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) behaves officiously, lavishly praising Frank and greeting guests as though she were herself the hostess. Frank disapproves of her familiarity with Jane, and he quietly declares his dislike for Mrs. Elton to [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse). Emma responds that he is ungrateful. He protests and seems agitated.

***Analysis part 2***

Frank’s behavior puzzles Emma, though she in part attributes his agitation and restlessness to his feelings for her. Yet the pieces do not quite add up; he reads strange meaning into her words. His dislike of Mrs. Elton, though, confirms Emma's sense of her as a generally presumptuous busybody.

***Summary Part 3:***

Though the [Westons](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) desired to give [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) the honor of leading the dance, they realize that [Mrs. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) expects it. To Emma’s dismay, [Mr. Weston](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) and [Mrs. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) lead the dance. Her demotion is “almost enough to make her think of marrying.” However, she anticipates a delightful evening; she only wishes [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley) would join in the dancing, too.

***Analysis Part 3:***

The order of dancing contains its own set of hierarchy, as the first couple holds the position of highest honor. Emma is mortified that she must come second to the newly married Mrs. Elton, comically reflecting that the latter’s privilege is almost enough to make one consider marriage.

***Summary Part 4:***

During one of the sets, Harriet is the only lady with no partner. [Mr. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) deliberately snubs her, gleefully refusing to ask her to dance. [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley), however, saves the day and leads Harriet into the dance. His chivalry thwarts Mr. Elton’s attempt to humiliate Harriet, to [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse)’s immense gratitude and pleasure.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Mr. Elton’s deliberate snub towards Harriet reveals his pride and cruelty. Mr. Knightley, in turn, reveals his charity and chivalry in rescuing Harriet; he wields social clout responsibly and kindly.

***Summary Part 5:***

[Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) thanks [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley) warmly, and he observes that they intended to slight Emma as well. She confesses her mistakes regarding the [Eltons](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) and admits that Mr. Knightley was right. In return, Mr. Knightley shares that [Harriet](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) would have been a much worthier wife—unpretentious, honest, and devoted—than [Mrs. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters). They conclude these warm concessions with a dance.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Emma and Mr. Knightley’s interactions reveal real warmth towards each other, as Emma truly values—though she does not always enjoy—Mr. Knightley’s guidance. Mr. Knightley’s very sternness shows his faith in Emma’s goodness and ability to improve herself. His willingness to critique her as an equal is a compliment.