***Emma***

***Chapter 43***

***Vol3Chapter7***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

* The next day, the exact same crew of people head up to Box Hill.
* You could think of this party as a nightmare version of day 1 (we sure do).
* It’s hot, nobody seems very excited about anything, and conversation sort of sucks.
* They all sit down on a hill, and Emma decides to liven things up a bit.
* She and Frank start flirting outrageously with each other. Sure, she knows that everybody else is listening – and that it’s ridiculously inappropriate – but she’s in a strangely elated mood.
* Frank, too, seems strangely driven to wild moods.
* He’s overly bright and far, far too attentive to Emma.
* He asks everyone to share what they’re thinking with Emma.
* No one takes them up on the offer.
* The two propose a game: each of the party will say one very witty thing – or two sort of witty things – or three boring things. Emma will judge who wins.
* Miss Bates laughs and observes that she won’t have to worry, then – at the very least, she can come up with three dull things.
* Emma, high on her own energy, replies that Miss Bates’ problem will be limiting herself to *only* three boring things.
* There’s a dreadful pause.
* Miss Bates slowly figures out what Emma meant.
* She’s very humble, so she just turns to Mr. Knightley and says that she must have been really boring for Emma to have said something so awful to an old friend.
* Mr. Weston comes up with a clever pun on Emma’s name. The company laughs.
* Mr. Knightley declares that if *this* is to be the focus of the game, he won’t participate.
* In other words, he’s not too fond of an Emma love-fest.
* Mrs. Elton throws a hissy-fit. For obvious reasons.
* By and large, the party disintegrates unhappily.
* Mr. and Mrs. Elton walk off. As they do, Frank makes a sarcastic remark about the "happy couple."
* Jane gravely replies that a couple that meets too quickly often finds later that they’re not compatible.
* Frank, more excited than ever, asks Emma to promise to select his wife.
* That way, she’ll be perfect. Like Emma. Aww….
* He declares that he’s leaving for Europe for a few years.
* When he returns, he wants his wife to be waiting for him!
* Emma laughs and agrees to find him a woman.
* As they’re about to leave, Mr. Knightley pulls Emma aside.
* He chastises her for speaking so cruelly to Miss Bates.
* Although Emma is immediately ashamed and sorry, she pretends not to understand him.
* Mr. Knightley explains why he’s so upset: Miss Bates is poor, and she’s seen her station in society sink as her money has dwindled.
* She’s only ever been kind to Emma.
* Being mean to Miss Bates, in other words, is sort of like kicking a hurt puppy – only the most uncaring person would ever think of it.
* Deeply ashamed, Emma turns her face away – and so she misses the chance to tell Mr. Knightley how sorry she truly is.
* The carriages roll away.
* Emma cries all the way home.

***Brief Summary:***

The next day arrives and everyone meets at Box Hill for the party. Emma is quite bored at first, both with Mr. Churchill and with Harriet, but things pick up once everyone is settled. Mr. Churchill and Emma flirt excessively, to the notice of everyone present.

Mr. Churchill calls for a game of conundrums, and Emma makes a comment about Miss Bates that although not meant in harm is very rude. Miss Bates seems to take notice of the comment, and the party continues.

After awhile, the servants return and everyone is bundled off into their own carriages. Mr. Knightley stops Emma and chastises her for her treatment of Miss Bates. Emma is mortified and shrinks into the carriage, forgetting to take proper leave of Mr. Knightley.

***Brief Analysis:***

Miss Fairfax's sudden departure from the party is very suspicious, Something very strange takes place with Emma's rudeness to Miss Bates. It is not at all like her and it is inferred that Mr. Churchill may be influencing her behavior. Mr. Knightley, who is never afraid to bring Emma's faults to light, catches her on this and makes her realize that she truly was rude to Miss Bates and that her actions might influence everyone to treat Miss Bates' differently, since everyone looks up to Emma.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Knightley would be more willing to overlook Miss Bates' character flaws if she was wealthy, but since she is not, they are more obvious. However, he still feels that Emma was very much in the wrong with her public rudeness towards her.

***Detailed Analysis:***

The day for "exploring" at Box Hill is a fine one as the ladies go there by carriage and the men on horseback. But there is a lack of union among them once there, and they break into little parties, Emma with Frank and Harriet. Frank is not only dull but also silent and stupid until the entire group sits down. Then he is extremely gallant toward Emma, and the two talk quite flirtatiously while the others say little or nothing. Frank makes a game of things by saying that Emma is presiding (an idea that makes Augusta swell) and that each person is to say something entertaining: either one very clever thing "or two things moderately clever — or three things very dull indeed." When Miss Bates exclaims that she will automatically do the last thing, Emma cannot resist saying, "Ah! ma'am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me — but you will be limited as to number — only three at once." It takes Miss Bates a moment to catch her meaning and then blush at the pain it causes. Mr. Weston leads off with a conundrum that is a flattering compliment of Emma, after which Augusta immediately excuses herself and her husband to go off walking.

Frank comments ironically on the "Happy couple!" and makes remarks about men and women meeting in the unnatural surroundings of resorts and the ill luck that it can generate. When Jane demurs, he bows in submission and then tells Emma in a lively tone to find a wife for him: "I am in no hurry. Adopt her, educate her." Emma agrees in the same tone and thinks of Harriet, as Jane takes her aunt to join the Eltons and George soon follows.

When it is time to go, George joins Emma beside her carriage and reproaches her for being "so unfeeling to Miss Bates." She is sorry but tries to laugh it off. However, George is serious and reasons at length that, because Miss Bates is poor, she deserves compassion and forbearance. He concludes thus: "I will tell you truths while I can, satisfied with proving myself your friend by very faithful counsel, and trusting that you will some time or other do me greater justice than you can do now." He leaves while she is silent with anger at herself and then reproaches herself for not having taken leave of him. The more she thinks of it, the more she is mortified and grieved: "How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates!" With only a silent Harriet in the carriage with her, "Emma felt the tears running down her cheeks almost all the way home."

To realize how much of a crisis this chapter is, the reader must come back to it after finishing the book. He will then see how Frank's flirtation with Emma has double meaning, that it very much involves Jane, for under the surface is a lovers' quarrel. It is for this reason that in the beginning Frank is silent and dull, and it is also for this reason that, as the Eltons walk away, he takes the opportunity to speak disparagingly of people's meeting at resorts. The reader who comes back to the chapter will be able to view Jane's situation with sympathetic understanding, and he will be able to see Frank's actions and comments as cruel but also psychologically believable as those of a lover.

Emma's crisis involves three things. First, she is over her attachment to Frank to the point of merely flirting. Second, she gets an actual though jesting invitation from Frank to find him a wife who, except for the hazel eyes (really hers) which he mentions, sounds very much like Harriet (since he is a perceptive young man, one wonders if he has guessed Emma's scheming and deliberately puts in one confusing detail); in terms of plot this is a test of Emma's determination to be strictly passive about the scheme. Third, after many years of containment Emma publicly expresses one part of her true feeling for Miss Bates and, in thereby bringing upon herself the reproaches of George, begins to realize how much his opinion of her matters. Her tears represent her own good nature, her sense of Miss Bates' goodness, and her sense of George's concern. Her own basic balance of good sense is also represented when she answers George about Miss Bates: "I know there is not a better creature in the world: but you must allow, that what is good and what is ridiculous are most unfortunately blended in her." Except perhaps for George, this last clause could be Miss Austen's ironic summation of practically every "creature" in the novel.

***Critical Study:***

The Box Hill trip is not a success. Mr. and Mrs. Elton keep to themselves; Mr. Knightley, Miss Bates, and Jane form a second exclusive party; and Emma stays with Harriet and Frank. Emma is disappointed by Harriet’s and Frank’s dullness. Later, Frank becomes excessively lively and gallant. Emma is confident that there is nothing behind his flirtations, but she is aware that others can pick up on their flirtation. The party sits about listlessly, and Frank says that Emma demands to know what they are thinking of. Mrs. Elton is offended by Frank’s deference to Emma, and Knightley asks dryly if she would really like to know what he is thinking. Frank then demands a piece of cleverness from each member of the party, asking them to produce either “one thing very clever . . . or two things moderately clever; or three things very dull indeed.” Miss Bates good-naturedly comments that the she will have no trouble meeting the last requirement, but Emma responds, “Ah! ma’am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me, but you will be limited as to number—only three at once.” Mr. Weston offers a conundrum in praise of Emma, and the Eltons leave in disgust for a walk.

Frank comments that sometimes matches made in public places become regrettable on further acquaintance and that, as a result, Mr. and Mrs. Elton are lucky that they are compatible. Jane demurs and leaves for a walk with her aunt and Mr. Knightley. Emma, left with Frank, grows tired of his flattery. Later, Mr. Knightley takes Emma aside and reprimands her for her conduct toward Miss Bates, reminding Emma that Miss Bates has had an unfortunate life and deserves compassion. Emma has never felt “so agitated, so mortified, [so] grieved” in her life; she cries almost all the way home.

***Critical Analysis:***

The next day, the party goes to Box Hill for a picnic. [Frank Churchill](https://www.gradesaver.com/emma/study-guide/character-list#frank-churchill) is still in a bad mood, but his mood improves when he concentrates only on amusing Emma. The party is listless, so Frank proposes a little game: everyone must say one thing very clever to Emma, or else two things moderately clever, or three things dull. When [Miss Bates](https://www.gradesaver.com/emma/study-guide/character-list#miss-bates) begins to chatter on incessantly, Emma puts her down harshly, telling her that she is limited to only three dull things. Later on, Emma, Jane and Frank discuss marriage. Jane speaks about how quick marriages can be salvaged, while Frank tells Emma to choose a wife for him and mold her (in her own image). Emma returns to the idea of Frank and Harriet. Afterwards, Mr. Knightley scolds Emma for treating Miss Bates so rudely, telling her that Miss Bates deserves her compassion and not her scorn.

Although Miss Bates previously acted only as comic relief in Emma, she serves a greater purpose in this chapter. No matter how absurd, chattering or boorish she may be, even Miss Bates deserves to be treated with some dignity. Her low situation makes her deserving of even kinder treatment, which makes Emma's sharp remark particularly cruel.

As Mr. Knightley reminds Emma, she made a great mistake when she puts down Miss Bates. As one of the highest members of Highbury society, Emma has a duty to treat those of lesser rank with kindness and to take pity on those such as Miss Bates. This is a turning point in Emma's behavior. Although she has thought ill of a number of Highbury residents before (the Eltons, [Jane Fairfax](https://www.gradesaver.com/emma/study-guide/character-list#jane-fairfax)), this is the first time that Emma has not behaved politely to one of them.

This parallels the events of Chapter Forty-two, in which Mr. Knightley acts as the voice of propriety and good manners in terms of Mrs. Elton. He upbraids Emma just as decisively, but there is a genuine warmth to his criticism. When he speaks to Emma about her mistake, he points out how admired and warmly considered Emma is. His wish is to improve Emma and not to put her in her place, as he did Mrs. Elton.

***Significance:***

The Box Hill outing falters when people separate into parties. The Eltons are one party, the Westons and [Mr. Woodhouse](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Woodhouse)another. [Mr. Knightley](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Knightley) stays with Miss Bates and Jane, while Frank, Harriet, and Emma form their own party. Frank's bad mood infects Emma. While the parties attempt to mix, there seems to be a fundamental breach that cannot be mended. Frank begins openly flirting with Emma, and she responds to him mostly because she feels out of sorts. At one point he demands on her behalf that each person say either one thing that is clever, two things moderately clever, or three things that are dull. Miss Bates immediately says she will say three dull things as soon as she opens her mouth; Emma cannot resist and says, "Pardon me—but you will be limited as to number—only three at once."

The Eltons walk off, and Frank says they are lucky that they suit one another, as it is not easy to tell a person's disposition when two people meet only briefly before marriage. "How many a man has committed himself on a short acquaintance, and rued it all the rest of his life!" Jane answers, "There is time to recover from it afterward."

Miss Bates is very hurt by Emma's remarks about her dullness, and before the party breaks up, Mr. Knightley scolds Emma in strong terms for her cruelty. He tells her that to show such disrespect to an elder who suffers so much adversity does her no credit. Emma is immediately remorseful and begins crying when she gets in the carriage.***Summary part by part and analysis***

***Summary part 1:***

Though the trip to Box Hill is initially dull during the walk, Frank livens up when they all sit down. Frank and Emma flirt excessively, though in Emma’s mind it is all meaningless play. The rest of the party sits listlessly, so Frank gallantly orders the company to share their thoughts with Emma. Some are amused, others affronted. Frank then requests either one thing very clever, two things moderately clever, or three things very dull indeed.

***Analysis part 1:***

Frank and Emma display a selfish disregard towards the company they are with, before which they flirt excessively and meaninglessly for their own entertainment. Indeed, they only turn to the others when Frank decides to create more entertainment involving them in his gallantry towards Emma.

***Summary part 2:***

When [Miss Bates](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) good-humoredly declares she will easily supply three dull things, [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) quips that she will have a great difficulty refraining from supplying only three. Miss Bates, hurt, blushes and murmurs to [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley) that she must be very annoying indeed or Emma would not have embarrassed her like that.

***Analysis part 2***

Emma also uses the comparably slow-witted Miss Bates as the butt of her joke, though it is an unkind one that clearly hurts the chatty spinster. However, Miss Bates herself generously attributes the blame to her own dullness, revealing her own good will.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Mr. Weston](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) presents a riddle in praise of [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse), and [Mrs. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) and [Mr. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) huffily excuse themselves from the game. Frank observes that they are fortunate to have such a well-matched marriage, given that brief acquaintances before marriage do not often turn out well. Jane objects that such acquaintances only sour in the face of weak, irresolute characters. Frank playfully commissions Emma to choose a wife for him. Jane, [Miss Bates](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters), and [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley) also depart for a walk from the group.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Frank and Jane’s discussion about the fate of marriages between brief acquaintances made in public places possesses a subtext, which refers to the many difficulties arising in their own relationship. Though marriage is such a central force in their society, it becomes clear that it is not always easy to either choose or keep a good mate, which requires resolution.

***Summary Part 4:***

As the outing ends, [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley) quietly reprimands [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) for her insolent and insensitive behavior to [Miss Bates](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters). When she tries to laugh it off, he insists that it is wrong of the privileged Emma to use her wit against a poor, helpless spinster: she sets a cruel example for others to follow. Emma is deeply distressed, mortified, and angry with herself. She weeps the entire way home.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Mr. Knightley again reveals the depth of his friendship, as he persists in correcting Emma in spite of his belief that she resents his advice. He reminds her that Miss Bates’s poverty and social situation demand compassion from the privileged Emma. Emma’s distress and receptivity towards his criticism also reveals that she is changing, humbled and repentant.

***Quotations:***

***Quotation 1:***

She was vexed beyond what could have been expressed—almost beyond what she could conceal. Never had she felt so agitated, so mortified, grieved, at any circumstance in her life. She was most forcibly struck. The truth of his representation there was no denying. She felt it at her heart. How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates! How could she have exposed herself to such ill opinion in any one she valued! And how suffer him to leave her without saying one word of gratitude, of concurrence, of common kindness!

***Explanation:***

This quotation comes at the end of Chapter 43. After being reprimanded by Mr. Knightley for insulting Miss Bates at the Box Hill picnic, a deluge of remorse comes over Emma as she realizes the cruelty of her behavior. This quotation marks the point at which Emma’s growing self-understanding, which helps her feel how wrongly she has treated Miss Bates, coincides with her growing attachment to Knightley. Her increasing self-knowledge is thus weighted, because it will bring her to or separate her from true love. This moment is also Emma’s most emotional in the novel, and it is narrated directly, unlike Mr. Elton’s proposal and Emma’s response to Mr. Knightley’s proposal. That the narrative so directly accesses Emma’s remorse underscores its seriousness—it is as if her thoughts have overpowered the narrator’s ability to relate them.

***Quotation 2:***

[…] every body had a burst of admiration on first arriving; but in the general amount of the day there was deficiency. There was a languor, a want of spirits, a want of union, which could not be got over. They separated too much into parties. (43.1)

***Explanation:***

Bad parties start off exactly the same as good ones. Austen’s narrator tracks the sinking feeling of a bad party, complete with the sense that there’s no real reason why nothing is working out as planned.

***Quotation 3:***

Mr. Knightley

I must, I will,—I will tell you truths while I can; satisfied with proving myself your friend by very faithful counsel, and trusting that you will some time or other do me greater justice than you can do now. (43.52)

***Explanation 3:***

Mr. Knightley’s honesty is his one unchangeable trait. It’s this honesty which can break through Emma’s desperation to remain witty and gleeful at the Box Hill party.