***Emma***

***Chapter 48***

***Vol3Chapter12***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

* Emma spends a good deal more time (and a good portion of this chapter) re-thinking everything that has happened in the past few months.
* Now that she might lose Mr. Knightley, Emma understands how much he means to her.
* It’s unthinkable that he might not have her first in his affections, as he has for so long!
* Moreover, Harriet wouldn’t even realize what a good man she had.
* How can you move from liking Mr. Elton to liking Mr. Knightley? It’s like comparing cheez-whiz to caviar. (OK, maybe you like cheez-whiz. Who are we to judge? But you get our point.)
* Emma allows herself to mope all day.
* Luckily, Mrs. Weston comes to call.
* She’s just been to see her future daughter-in-law.
* She tells Emma that Jane was initially very ashamed and awkward, but she eventually told Mrs. Weston all about her love for Frank.
* Emma immediately pities Jane.
* It’s clear that Frank doesn’t know – or doesn’t care – how much damage a secret engagement could do to his reputation. Jane, however, cares deeply.
* Emma regrets her actions for the past few months all over again.
* Honestly, the only thing separating Emma’s fate from Jane’s is money.
* Emma spends some time thinking about how horrible Jane’s position must have been.
* It begins to rain.
* (It always rains in novels when life sucks.)
* Alone again, Emma thinks about how everyone will soon leave her.
* Mrs. Weston is having a baby, which means that she won’t come over nearly as often and that her attention will always be elsewhere.
* Jane and Frank will soon leave.
* And Harriet…and Mr. Knightley…
* For the first time, we see Emma regretting the fact that she’s left alone with a crotchety father.
* She can see her future mapped out for her.
* Day after day after day exactly the same – alone.

***Brief Summary:***

Mrs. Weston arrives at Hartfield after visiting with Miss Fairfax. Emma learns that Miss Fairfax had a terrible time concealing the engagement and Emma deeply regrets her past actions in Miss Fairfax's regard. She also regrets her actions in trying to improve Harriet and wishes that she had chosen Miss Fairfax as a friend instead.

Emma's father takes ill and she is continually at his side, giving her time to reflect on their circumstances. Soon, if the Westons have a child, she will lose their company. Mr. Churchill will no longer be visiting, and Miss Fairfax will leaving as well. If Harriet does marry Mr. Knightley, their one remaining friend will be gone, leaving her alone with her father.

***Brief Analysis:***

Finally, Emma begins to realize that all of her machinations may turn out to be her undoing. By encouraging Harriet to leave her station and pursue someone far above her in society, she may have ostracized their only remaining true friend.

She reflects on her attachment to Mr. Knightley and deeply regrets what she has done with Harriet. In essence, by her kind attentions, she has created a monster with Harriet, and one that may turn out to do her much more harm than she thought.

***Detailed Analysis(Ch46-48):***

Emma rethinks all of the events of the past months. She realizes that it has always been important to her to be “first” with Mr. Knightley and that he has always had special concern for her, but she cannot believe he could return her feelings, especially when he has just been so angry with her about her rudeness to Miss Bates. She still believes she would not marry him, even if he asked, because she cannot leave her father. She anticipates having the opportunity to observe him and Harriet together.

Mrs. Weston arrives to report that she has just visited with Jane and that Jane admitted to having suffered a good deal since entering into the secret engagement. She blames herself for her misjudgment and acknowledges Emma’s kindness during her sickness. Hearing this account, Emma again expresses anger at Frank’s behavior. Mrs. Weston again defends him, though she has not yet received his explanatory letter, but Emma is too distracted by her thoughts about Mr. Knightley to pay attention. Emma regrets once more that she was not a better friend to Jane, as Knightley had advised, and she reflects on how desolate life will be without Knightley’s constant visits to Hartfield.

The novel’s narrative pace speeds up in these chapters, as instead of facing a slow accumulation of details that require interpretation, we begin to be given the key detail for interpreting all that has transpired thus far—the answer to the question of who is in love with whom.

Austen’s narrator finally describes Emma’s development explicitly, rather than implicitly, as she does throughout the novel. At the same time, Harriet finally realizes Emma’s limitations. Harriet begins her conversation with Emma about her feelings for Knightley with an assertion that Emma can “see into everybody’s heart,” but she soon understands that she has been wrong. Rather than waiting for Emma’s approval of a match between herself and Knightley, Harriet proceeds to explain in a self-confident manner why she believes their disparity in rank need not be a hindrance. She goes so far as to express hope that Emma will not present obstacles to the match, demonstrating that her attachment to Knightley is stronger than her loyalty to her friend. When Emma asks whether Harriet has reasons to believe that her feelings are returned, Harriet answers “modestly, but not fearfully” in the affirmative.

The brief, general way in which the narrator describes Emma’s realization of her love for Knightley makes Emma’s previous inability to discover the truth about her feelings seem almost ridiculous.

A few minutes were sufficient for making her acquainted with her own heart. A mind like hers, once opening to suspicion, made rapid progress; she touched, she admitted, she acknowledged the whole truth . . . Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!

As with Emma’s emotional confrontation with Mr. Elton in Chapter 15, Austen shies away from describing in too much detail the shock of Emma’s realization. Instead, the narrator moves on to Emma’s reflections regarding her own conduct. The novel seems more comfortable making fine distinctions between social obligations and moral duties than in describing human passion directly. But perhaps the picture we have been given of the small gestures that continually pass between Emma and Mr. Knightley communicate their feelings more strongly than any direct description could.

There is something disturbing about the nature of Emma’s realization that she has treated Harriet badly. Using free association to relate Emma’s thoughts, the narrator comments, “She saw it all with a clearness which had never blessed her before. How improperly had she been acting by Harriet! How inconsiderate, how indelicate, how irrational, how unfeeling, had been her conduct!” Yet, following her mistake with Mr. Elton, Emma has already recognized the inappropriateness of meddling with Harriet’s romantic life, and she has adjusted her behavior accordingly. Furthermore, Harriet now seems to have achieved the success Emma wished for her—a match with Knightley would raise her position in the world immensely. It is clear that Emma believes she has done wrong not because she has injured Harriet, but because she has injured herself, and possibly Mr. Knightley (by exposing him to an undignified match).

***Critical Study:***

Emma has never known before how much her happiness depends on being first with George. She rationalizes a great deal, deciding that, if she could be sure of his never marrying at all, she would be perfectly satisfied. For Emma feels that she cannot marry because of her father. George is expected back any day, and she can then observe him, but in the meanwhile she resolves against seeing Harriet, an arrangement to which Harriet submits approvingly.

Mrs. Weston calls and recounts her visit that day with Jane, for whom she has nothing but high regard except for the secret engagement. Emma is all sympathy and understanding, very conscious of her past injustice toward Jane. That evening is all gloom for Emma; even the weather adds its share. Hartfield is comparatively deserted and seems likely to become even more so. The child that is to be born will keep the Westons away; Jane and Frank will naturally be leaving; and if George marries Harriet, there will no longer be those friendly and comfortable visits from Donwell Abbey. What increases her wretchedness is the reflection, "never far distant from her mind," that it is all her own work. When she reaches this pitch of thought, she starts, sighs heavily, and walks about the room.

Emma is experiencing an ultimate degree of comeuppance. Almost everything, including Mrs. Weston's report of Jane, stands in direct contrast to her unhappiness. Emma's reaction to the situation — her feelings and thoughts — epitomize Miss Austen's concern with the results, rather than the high and dramatic moment, of strong emotions. The delineation of Emma's reflections represents the low point of her career, and the question is will she submit to the circumstances or will she find inner resource enough to cope with them, either in the old way or a new one? Is Emma as strong as she has seemed?

***Critical Analysis:***

Emma gives up hope that Mr. Knightley is in love with her. Even if he were, she would still not be able to marry him because of her father's need for constant attention. Mrs. Weston tells Emma that Jane Fairfax regrets being involved in a suspicious private engagement and wishes that she had handled the situation with greater decorum. Emma feels disheartened and alone, since the pregnant Mrs. Weston will soon be preoccupied with her child and Frank Churchill will no longer visit frequently.

[Emma Woodhouse](https://www.gradesaver.com/emma/study-guide/character-list#emma-woodhouse) has thus far been completely satisfied with the condition of her life. In her mind she has everything that she desires: fortune, status, and a comfortable social circle. Yet in this chapter she realizes that an integral part of her happiness depends on Mr. Knightley's affections. Although they have no romantic attachment as of yet, it is important to Emma that she is the most important woman in his life. Realizing that she might lose this position to Harriet Smith makes Emma aware how deeply she cares for him. This helps to explain why no attachment between Emma and Mr. Knightley has been formed earlier. Both already realized that they were the most important person in the other's life.

The discussion between Mrs. Weston and Emma concerning Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax brings up the important point that the two must certainly be in love with one another. Both endured a great deal of pain during their secret engagement and risked their reputation among society by deceiving their friends and family. As Emma states, "her affection must have overpowered her judgment." Yet love cannot entirely excuse deception; both Jane and Frank behaved improperly. Since all turned out well for the two of them ­ they hurt nobody during their deception and will be properly married soon ­ Austen's major point is that their behavior was wrong for reasons of manners. Even without any negative consequences, the deception was wrong as a breach of decorum.

At this point in the novel, Emma is alone, outside the social interactions of her friends. Everyone else has already married (the Westons) or plans to (Frank and Jane). She may always have her wealth and status, but Emma still may risk loneliness by clinging to her self-absorption. This isolation will not come from becoming a social pariah but will instead occur if she remains immature and vain among responsible adults with greater responsibilities to consider.

***Significance(Ch47-48):***

Emma continues to ruminate on how her happiness depends on her being loved by Mr. Knightley. Emma feels that perhaps she has endangered that love with her treatment of Miss Bates. Or perhaps Harriet has already captured his heart.

Mrs. Weston interrupts Emma's thoughts with a visit. She is just back from speaking with Jane, who told Mrs. Weston how much she suffered through the secret engagement. Jane apologizes for her aloof behavior and also conveys her thanks to Emma for her kindness during her illness. These revelations are additional reasons for Emma to feel humiliation and remorse for her own bad behavior toward Jane.

Emma has come to the place in her story where the chickens come home to roost. At first she is relieved to hear that Harriet is not pining for Frank, but when Harriet tells her who she is in love with, Emma is astonished. Not only does she suddenly realize she is in love with [Mr. Knightley](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Knightley) herself, but she also sees how improperly she has been acting with Harriet. "What blindness, what madness, had led her on! It struck her with a dreadful force, and she was ready to give it every bad name in the world." Critic Barbara Thaden has called [Frank Churchill](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Frank_Churchill) another parody of Emma, as they are both privileged people who toy with other people's emotions. Frank spent a lot of the time in Hartfield trifling with Jane and Emma, and in some ways he treated them as his playthings. Emma did a similar thing to Harriet, taking her on as a project, deciding the trajectory that her life would take, interfering in the natural course of her relationship with Robert Martin, and deciding whom she should and should not socialize with and how far she might look above her station to make an advantageous match. Certainly, Emma wants Harriet to look above her, but not so high as Mr. Knightley.

After Emma leaves Harriet, she wonders how she got to such a place, recognizing "the blindness of her own head and heart." She wonders how long Mr. Knightley has held his primary place in her heart. She realizes that her pretense that this was not the case has been a delusion, and in fact she was never in love with Frank. Moreover, if she hadn't brought Harriet into her life, she would have nothing to fear from her with regard to Mr. Knightley.

A combination of loneliness and ennui, along with an excess of pride, condescension, and imagination, put Emma on a path to take Harriet as her pet project and attempt to improve her and "marry her up." But why has Emma hidden from herself her true feelings about Mr. Knightley? Perhaps partially because he is so much a part of her and who she is that she has taken their love for granted, like the air that she breathes. Another reason may be that, as a proud and independent woman, she does not wish to go through the marriage ordeal. Whenever there is strong love and attachment, and especially when it is accompanied by sexual love, both parties must be willing to give themselves up. And traditionally—and most definitely for a woman in the Regency era—loving a man means sacrificing one's own selfhood and independence. The romance between Emma and Mr. Knightley provides a lot of latitude for Emma, but it is still not a union between equals. Emma knows that when she surrenders to the marriage ordeal, she will be permanently transformed. No doubt there will be many ways in which love and marriage will improve Emma, but she will lose a part of herself when she becomes Mrs. George Knightley.

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

***Summary part 1:***

Until she is threatened by his loss, Emma never knew how important it was for her to be first in [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley)’s affection and regard. She realizes that she has taken his attentions for granted, which she now feels were undeserved in the first place. In spite of her new revelations, Emma feels she cannot marry because of her duty to her father.

***Analysis part 1:***

Emma’s wishes that Mr. Knightley not marry at all remain rather selfish, motivated as they are by her own emotional investment in his affairs. At the same time, it is an un-acted upon wish, marking a change in Emma, who previously would have tried to make the world fit with how she wanted it to be.

***Summary part 2:***

[Mrs. Weston](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) arrives at Hartfield, having just visited [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/jane-fairfax). She relates that Jane has suffered greatly during the concealment of her engagement, and she repents allowing her affection to overpower her judgment in relation to Emma. Jane also expressed gratitude towards [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) for the kindness she displayed during her illness.

***Analysis part 2***

Jane’s reserve and coldness towards Emma is finally rendered fully sympathetic and comprehensible—Emma unknowingly caused Jane emotional harm. Jane also displays a generosity and fairness in recognizing Emma’s kindness towards her.

***Summary Part 3:***

Emma reflects with remorse that her behavior with [Frank](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill) must have caused Jane considerable distress. As a gloomy evening sets in, she considers what a loss [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley)’s marriage would cause to Hartfield. Her only consolation is in the hope that all of these desolate events will leave her more rational, self-aware, and a better person.

***Analysis Part 3:***

That Emma anticipates consolation in the hope that, even if she is to lose Mr. Knightley forever, she will at least grow from her mistakes reveals the lasting, good, and humbling impact of Mr. Knightley on Emma’s heart.