***Emma***

***Chapter 49***

***Vol3Chapter13***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

* Let us just interject a quick note:
* Please read this chapter! Please! OK, we’re begging now. Please!
* Ahem. We’ll begin again:
* In the afternoon, the weather clears.
* Emma wanders in the garden, thinking about her sad, sad future.
* Suddenly, Mr. Knightley appears.
* He’s returned from London.
* He’s heard about Jane and Frank’s marriage.
* Assuming that Emma still loves Frank, he gently begins to console her.
* It takes awhile for Emma to figure out what’s happening, but when she catches on, she corrects him.
* Mr. Knightley is silent for a few minutes, and then begins to talk about how happy Frank’s life is. At 23, Frank found the woman of his dreams.
* Mr. Knightley declares that he envies Frank – and he asks Emma if she wants to know why.
* Convinced that Mr. Knightley is about to reveal his feelings for Harriet, Emma tries to shut him up.
* Mr. Knightley looks deeply hurt, but he agrees that Emma must be right.
* Emma immediately feels sorry.
* Wouldn’t a true friend want to help Mr. Knightley, even if it were at her own expense?
* She asks Mr. Knightley – as a friend – to tell her what he meant.
* Mr. Knightley confesses that he loves Emma.
* He just wants to know that he *could* someday have the chance to make her love him.
* Love birds start singing. Bands start playing.
* Not really. But Emma’s pretty happy. And she tells Mr. Knightley that she loves him.
* Now they’re both really happy. For several pages.
* They agree to get married.
* Of course.

***Brief Summary:***

Mr. Knightley returns and arrives at Hartfield as Emma is walking around the garden. She mentions the news of Mr. Churchill's wedding, which he had already received that morning in the form of a letter from Mr. Weston.

As he tries to discern if Emma is upset by this news, he is extremely attentive to her. He takes her arm and does his best to find out if she really was in love with Mr. Churchill. Emma reveals that she was never in love with Mr. Churchill, which finally prompts him to at long last reveal that he is in love with her himself.

This pleases Emma very much and the chapter ends on a very happy note.

***Brief Analysis:***

We have finally reached Mr. Knightley's declaration of love, which has been hinted at through the entire novel. Emma doesn't even seem to give her vow to remain single another thought as she happily reflects that Mr. Knightley loves her. Nor does Harriet seem to enter her mind at this point. Once again, Harriet seems doomed to have the object of her affection fall in love with Emma.

***Detailed Analysis:***

Emma goes for a walk in the garden. To her surprise, Mr. Knightley joins her. He has just returned from London. She worries that Knightley will confess his feelings for Harriet, and she offers her news about Frank and Jane’s secret engagement. Knightley already knows about it and offers his consolation, but Emma assures him she has never had feelings for Frank. She explains and expresses regret for her behavior, and Knightley is strangely silent. Finally, he admits he may have underrated Frank and expresses envy at his circumstances. Worried that Knightley is about to discuss Harriet, Emma quickly silences him. He is mortified, and seeing his pain Emma invites him to speak after all, saying she will be glad to hear him as a friend. He says he does not wish her friendship and declares his love. She is surprised, thrilled, and by the time they reach the house they are engaged to marry. Knightley is surprised as well—he was convinced that Emma was in love with Frank; he departed for London to cool his feelings for her, and he has returned thinking she would need comfort. He has moved from resigned despair to perfect happiness in half an hour.

***Critical Study:***

The morning's bad weather clears in the afternoon, and Emma goes outdoors for the serenity of the shrubbery. George appears, joins her for the walk, and is silent. Emma finally starts the conversation and learns that he already knows the news about Jane and Frank, was apprised of it only that morning, in fact. When she says that she should have listened to his advice and then sighs, he takes her arm and commiserates with her. Understanding him, she assures him that she was never attached to Frank. He is silent, and she continues by saying that her vanity was flattered by Frank but that she was "somehow or other safe from him." Still George is silent and deep in thought, but finally he says of Frank that "With such a woman he has a chance." Declaring that Frank is a very fortunate man to find such a woman for his wife and at such an early age, George admits that he is envious.

Emma fears that they are within half a sentence of Harriet. She does not encourage him to explain the point of envy, and George takes this in apparent mortification. As they reach the house, she reconsiders his depressed manner and offers to listen as a friend. Shaken, he addresses her as his "dearest Emma" and asks if he has no chance of ever succeeding. She is so utterly agitated by what his words imply that he has to do the talking, and he does quite a convincing job of declaring, in no uncertain terms, his love for her and his wish to hear her speak. "What did she say? — Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does. She said enough to show there need not be despair — and to invite him to say more himself."

George had certainly not come with the intention of asking her to marry him, but within half an hour he has "passed from a thoroughly distressed state of mind, to something so like perfect happiness, that it could bear no other name." Emma's change is equal. Thus it is that "She was his own Emma, by hand and word, when they returned into the house."

The two preceding chapters have presented and explored an inward change within Emma. The revelations, while leading to the positiveness of self-recognition and self-knowledge, lead also to the negative position involving gloom, despair, estrangement, and isolation. This chapter constitutes an outward change for Emma and thereby effects a reversal of fortune. Starting out with misunderstandings, it concludes with understanding and positive, happy commitment. Containing a highly interesting rearrangement of human relationships, the three chapters together also constitute the major climax of the novel. This rearrangement of relationships is the process of the social order righting itself, but it is also the natural working of equals finding each other. Though some more rearrangement is to come in order to resolve all the forces set in motion in the novel, the ideal correspondence between natural and social order is well on its way to being realized.

***Critical Analysis:***

Mr. Knightley stops by Hartfield to see Emma, and they discuss Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax. He fears that Jane will be miserable with a man as intolerable as Frank Churchill but hopes that she will improve him. Mr. Knightley admits that he envies Frank in one respect. Emma fears that he will mention Harriet, but Mr. Knightley then professes his love for Emma. The two are now reassured of their love for one another.

The final decision on Frank Churchill's actions comes when Emma discusses his engagement with Mr. Knightley. While Mr. Knightley has always held a low opinion of Frank Churchill out of jealousy for his apparent affection for Emma, he now realizes how he underrated him. Mr. Knightley serves as the final judge of character in the novel, and, when he comes to forgive Frank Churchill this is a cue from Austen that Frank, for all of his faults, should not be considered disreputable.

Once again, manners and etiquette obscure the true emotions and cause dangerous mixed signals. The great propriety that Emma shows in dealing with Frank Churchill makes it unclear what feelings she may have. Mr. Knightley from this concluded that she might be in love with Frank. It is necessary to discern what each character does or does not feel under the heavy veil of polite behavior. In believing that Emma might love Frank, Mr. Knightley made his one major error.

Mr. Knightley professes love in a measured and utterly dignified manner that is very different from the fawning adoration that Mr. Elton showered upon Emma in the carriage ride. When he and Emma declare their love for one another, it is occasion for relief, rather than for abundant joy. Austen suggests that a match between the two was inevitable as they are the two highest members of Highbury society. Moreover, Mr. Knightley's criticisms of her were merely preparation for making her a suitable wife.

***Significance:***

[Mr. Knightley](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Knightley) returns from London to console Emma for what he imagines is a broken heart. Emma lets him know that she is aware of the engagement and is not distressed, and in his relief he calls Frank "a disgrace to the name of man" and expresses his fear for Jane's happiness. Emma further explains her initial attraction to Frank—he was nearby, he was the stepson of Mrs. Weston, and he flattered her vanity—but that she was never attached to him. Mr. Knightley reiterates that he never liked Frank and claims that he is an extremely fortunate young man whom everyone wants to forgive. Emma says he sounds like he envies Frank, and Mr. Knightley answers that indeed he does. Mr. Knightley prods Emma to ask him why he is envious, but she fears to hear, thinking he wants to confess his love for Harriet. When she sees he is mortified, she tells him to continue, and she will listen as a friend. He then confesses his feelings and says, "If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more." Emma happily accepts Mr. Knightley's declaration of love and does not tell him why she hesitated. On his side, he is overjoyed that she does not love Frank after all, and is still "his own Emma."

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

***Summary part 1:***

Some time later, while Emma takes a reflective walk in the garden, she encounters [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley), just returned from London. Concerned from his serious air that he wants to share his feelings about [Harriet](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters), Emma directs the topic to Frank and Jane’s secret engagement. Mr. Knightley, however, already knows and has come to comfort her. Emma confesses she never loved [Frank](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill) and regrets her flirtation with him.

***Analysis part 1:***

Emma interprets Mr. Knightley’s behavior in light of Harriet’s belief in his reciprocated affection. Mr. Knightley misreads Emma’s agitation as related to Frank, as opposed to himself. Unlike prior misperceptions, this one is inspired not by self-interest, but humility; neither believes they possess their beloved’s heart.

***Summary part 2:***

[Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley) begins that he envies [Frank](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill), and [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) cuts him short to avoid hearing about [Harriet](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters). Mr. Knightley is mortified, and Emma feels bad; she decides she will hear him as a friend. To her great astonishment, Mr. Knightley declares his love for her; she, in turn, confesses hers. Both of them are ecstatic, having gone from believing their beloved attached to another to realizing their beloved is theirs. They return from the walk engaged.

***Analysis part 2***

The misperception is finally brought to a delightful close, as all of the signs of hesitation turn out to be the result of returned love; ironically, Emma’s attempt to silence Mr. Knightley from speaking of Harriet discouraged his declaration of love for her, and had she not decided to selflessly hear him out as a friend he might not have made his feelings known to her.

***Quotations***

***Quotation 1:***

Seldom, very seldom does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken; but where, as in this case, though the conduct is mistaken, the feelings are not, it may not be very material.

***Explanation 1:***

This quotation, which follows Emma and Mr. Knightley’s betrothal in Chapter 49, could be taken as the novel’s motto. The quotation says that although almost all human speech holds something back, or doesn’t tell the entire truth, as long as the speech is loyal to the speaker’s feelings, the fact that we talk without complete truth is not a big deal. The novel is filled with disguises and mistakes. Some are more reprehensible than others, and some are more avoidable than others. Though Elton’s insincerity and Frank’s conscious deception are critically portrayed—and Emma’s mistakes gently corrected—we are left with the sense that, to some degree, misunderstandings are made inevitable by the social conventions that govern human intercourse, and by the imperfections of human communication itself. The remedy for such imperfect communication, according to this quotation, is the genuine emotion of the human heart.