***Emma***

***Chapter 50***

***Vol3Chapter14***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

* Our narrator reminds us that one major obstacle to Emma’s happiness still exists: her father.
* Mr. Woodhouse would be devastated if his last daughter left him.
* Oh, yeah – and also Harriet.
* First things first: Emma writes a letter to Harriet, explaining all that’s happened.
* That’s enough to ruin her day – but luckily, Mr. Knightley shows up just as she’s getting really sad.
* And who could stay sad long with the perfect man around?
* Right after he leaves, she gets a letter from Mrs. Weston –which includes in it a letter from Frank.
* Frank’s letter explains all that’s happened ever since he met Jane.
* He also apologizes for seeming to lead Emma on – but he was convinced that she knew about Jane.
* He says lots of nice things about everyone – including Emma – and seems truly sorry.
* We know, we know – it’s a bit hard to believe him. But Emma does.

***Brief Summary:***

Emma and Mr. Knightley return to the house for tea, and he leaves shortly after. Emma is now left to reflect on what has happened and what it means for her future. Since her father is an invalid, she determines that she must remain engaged until his death and not marry until this occurs.

Harriet enters her mind and she sits down to write Harriet a letter. Emma is successful in getting Isabella to take Harriet in for a while to remove her from the situation until Emma can figure out what to do.

A letter arrives from Randalls containing a long letter of explanation from Mr. Churchill, which Mrs. Weston wants Emma to read. She sits down immediately and pores over the very long letter, feeling much better about the situation after finishing it.

***Brief Analysis:***

Emma once again has her way by sending Harriet off to London to stay with Isabella. By removing her from Highbury and Hartfield, she will have a chance to come up with an explanation regarding Mr. Knightley.

The letter from Mr. Churchill is used as a device to explain and provide the back-story of his relationship with Miss Fairfax. Once you have completed reading this chapter, much of the book now makes sense and many plot twists are revealed.

***Detailed Summary:***

Emma can barely conceal her feelings as she and Mr. Knightley join her father for tea. That night, Emma lies awake worrying about Harriet and her father. She decides she will write a letter to Harriet explaining what has happened and arrange for Harriet to visit Isabella in London to give both of them some time to adjust to the new situation. She decides that she and Knightley must postpone their wedding until after her father dies.

Mrs. Weston forwards Emma a letter from Frank in which he explains that all of his actions, including his attentions to Emma, were guided by a need to maintain the secrecy of his engagement to Jane. He apologizes for his behavior, but explains that he could tell Emma was not attached to him, and says that he was under the impression that Emma already knew about him and Jane. He adores Jane and is miserable that he has made her suffer. The couple quarreled the morning of the Donwell Abbey party because Jane was upset about his behavior toward Emma, thinking it an inappropriate way to maintain their secret. Frank was upset about Jane’s caution, which he interpreted as coldness. Frank then left for Richmond, and Jane wrote to him to break off the engagement. He received the letter from Jane the morning his aunt died, and in the flurry of subsequent correspondence failed to send his conciliating response to her. She sent his letters back to him, indicating that he could return her letters at her governess post. This was the first news Frank had heard of her new position, and he threw himself at his uncle’s mercy, receiving approval for the match. He then sped to Highbury to find Jane very ill. They reconciled, and Frank admits that he is happier than he deserves to be.

***Critical Study:***

Emma now has two obstacles to a marriage with Mr. Knightley: her father and [Harriet Smith](https://www.gradesaver.com/emma/study-guide/character-list#harriet-smith). Emma cannot marry Mr. Knightley while her father lives, for any marriage would greatly inconvenience him. Moreover, she does not know how to break the news to Harriet. She attempts to get Harriet invited to stay with Isabella in London, where she could be distracted. [Frank Churchill](https://www.gradesaver.com/emma/study-guide/character-list#frank-churchill) writes a letter to Mrs. Weston, which expresses regret for his deception and clarifies some of his behavior. He writes that Emma is a young woman unlikely ever to be attached, for she is so complete in herself, and that he was often tempted to let her know about Jane.

This chapter serves mostly to clarify earlier inconsistencies in Frank Churchill's behavior, as well as imminent obstacles that Emma and Mr. Knightley must face. The letter from Frank Churchill also solves some of the plot's mysteries: he was the one who sent the piano to [Jane Fairfax](https://www.gradesaver.com/emma/study-guide/character-list#jane-fairfax), and he ordered it when he was in London ostensibly getting his hair cut. When he left Emma to return to the Churchills and seemed to be on the verge of admitting something, he was considering telling her the secret of his engagement. Finally, when Jane Fairfax was miserable and ready to accept the job as a governess, it was because she was so ashamed of her secretive behavior she broke off the engagement.

The letter also once again returns to the issue of manners and unspoken emotions. Frank Churchill's assumptions contrast directly with Mr. Knightley's. While Mr. Knightley assumed that Emma believed herself to be the object of Frank Churchill's affections, Frank Churchill assumed that Emma realized that Frank and Jane were secretly in love. Because Emma's great propriety left so much unspoken, both men made equally invalid assumptions about what she believed.

***Critical Analysis:***

Emma writes a letter to Harriet to inform her that she is engaged to Mr. Knightley and plans to arrange a visit to London for Harriet with Emma's sister, Isabella. Emma is worried not only about Harriet's response to the news, but also about [Mr. Woodhouse](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Woodhouse)'s: "She hardly knew yet what Mr. Knightley would ask; but a very short parley with her own heart produced the most solemn resolution of never quitting her father." After she spends some time with Mr. Knightley and he leaves, Emma gets a letter from Mrs. Weston, which is Frank's promised letter to his stepmother.

In the letter, Frank asks forgiveness, alluding to why he had to keep the engagement a secret. He says he thought Emma suspected his attachment to Jane, and, in any case, he sensed that she had no strong feeling for him. He relates that he quarreled with Jane, first at Donwell Abbey and then again at Box Hill, over his attentions to Emma and his lack of discretion. He claims he doubted Jane's love for him, which is why he behaved so badly at the Box Hill picnic. Jane then wrote to him to break off the engagement, but in the turmoil of his aunt's death, he did not post his response. When he received his parcel of letters back from Jane, he realized she was leaving him and had applied for a job as a governess, and that is when he asked for his uncle's blessing.

Slowly the knot of misunderstanding is being unraveled. [Mr. Knightley](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Knightley) lets Emma know that he has come to comfort her, and she tells him the absolute truth—that she doesn't care for Frank and never did. This allows him to open up to her about his own feelings. Emma at first fears he will tell her about his feelings for Harriet, but her love for him overrides her own painful doubts, and so he is able to confess how he feels. Mr. Knightley is not entirely without blame in their misunderstandings. On the one hand, Emma knows that he loves her, but on the other, he has not made it clear that he is interested. He has not given her any conventional, outward signs that he is courting her or has any intentions of doing so. He would have done better, perhaps, to scold her less and allow her to be privy to his feelings more, especially when Frank came into the picture.

Frank's letter shows he has not changed at all nor learned any lessons. He begs for everyone's forgiveness, but his apologies are more a matter of form than substance. By now he must know that Emma had no idea he was attached to Jane, and yet he says in his letter he was sure she had some knowledge of his feelings and speaks of his assumptions as if they are matters of fact. He claims he thought Jane did not care about him because of her reserve, but that's hard to believe considering he was the one who imposed the rules of secrecy on their relations. More realistically, he got angry with Jane because he did not get his way in the moment. To punish her, he acted abominably at Box Hill and then expected her to "make the first advances." When he left Highbury and she broke off the engagement, he wrote back but misplaced his response, which seems an act of carelessness. All in all, his letter is a rationalization, not an apology, and it remains unconvincing.

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

***Summary part 1:***

Emma worries about breaking the news to [Mr. Woodhouse](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-woodhouse) and [Harriet](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters). Emma decides that she will not marry until her father dies. She then informs Harriet about the situation via [letter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/symbols/letters) and arranges for her to stay with Isabella in London, to heal and ease the awkwardness.

***Analysis part 1:***

Emma thoughtfully considers how to best behave towards her father and Harriet, both of whom have different reasons for disliking her engagement. She attempts to act as fairly and kindly as possible to each, marking her character.

***Summary part 2:***

[Mrs. Weston](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) forwards [Frank](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill)’s [letter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/symbols/letters) explaining his behavior and secrecy, which was due to the restrictions of his Churchill relations. He used his courtship of [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) as a cover for his engagement, believing that she was never really interested in him; he also believed she suspected his secret. [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/jane-fairfax), however, disapproved of his behavior to Emma, and they quarreled about it at Donwell Abbey. Frank felt Jane was coldly cautious and departed for Richmond.

***Analysis part 2***

Frank’s behavior, though perhaps not his intentions, is insensitive and blind; he interprets Emma’s heart and mind as is convenient to his own interests, even assuming that she is aware of his engagement. His dismissal of Jane’s feelings reveals his determination to do—and see—things his own way.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/jane-fairfax) then broke off the engagement by [letter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/symbols/letters), but in the chaos of [Mrs. Churchill](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters)’s death [Frank](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill) misplaced his reply. Jane then returned all of his letters and requested hers to be returned to her new governess post. Realizing his blunder and the actions that Jane had taken, Frank begged for his uncle’s approval of the marriage. Having received it, he then dashed off to Highbury to reconcile with Jane, whom he acknowledges to be much worthier than him, and who has made him happier than he deserves.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Frank, blinded by his own careless confidence, does not see how deeply his behavior has wounded Jane and damaged their relations. When he finally realizes his mistakes, however, Frank demonstrates that he too is capable of taking responsibility and the necessary action to fix the problems he has made. Frank has a good heart, though perhaps a weak will.

***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.