***Emma***

***Chapter 55***

***Vol3Chapter19***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

* Harriet returns from London.
* She and Emma have a rather strained first meeting – but Harriet is too happy to stay angry long.
* She marries Robert.
* Once her father (a merchant) hears that she’s getting married, he provides a yearly sum for her.
* Emma spends a few minutes thinking about what sort of match she once imagined for Mr. Knightley: the illegitimate daughter of a merchant? Really?
* Emma and Mr. Knightley had agreed not to get married until Mr. John Knightley and Isabella can come to the wedding (and be with Mr. Woodhouse for the honeymoon).
* Unfortunately, Mr. Woodhouse believes that the marriage won’t occur for at least another year or two (or three).
* Why rush things?
* After all, marriage is marriage. It’s best to put it off as long as possible.
* Luckily, a minor disaster occurs.
* Someone robs Mrs. Weston’s henhouse.
* Mr. Woodhouse, petrified that his home will soon be vandalized, urges Emma to marry at once.
* And so she does.
* They have a lovely, simple wedding.
* Mrs. Elton thinks it’s rather shabby.

***Brief Summary:***

Harriet arrives back in Highbury and she reconciles with Emma. They are both quite happy now with their matches. It is revealed that Harriet is the daughter of a tradesman who is very well off, and as such Harriet will not need to be removed from the society at Highbury.

Harriet and Mr. Martin are the first of the three couples to wed, while it announced that Mr. Churchill and Miss Fairfax would marry in November. That leaves Emma and Mr. Knightley to set a date.

Mr. Woodhouse is still not quite resigned to the idea, but a rash of poultry house robbing finally makes up his mind. He will feel much safer with Mr. Knightley around and consents to the wedding. Emma and Mr. Knightley are wed at the close of the chapter, and Mrs. Elton gets in one last barb regarding the accoutrements of the wedding before the book ends.

***Brief Analysis:***

The book ends, as do all of Miss Austen's works, with a wedding. In this case, we are treated to two weddings, as Mr. Martin weds Harriet and Mr. Knightley and Emma finally reach the altar.

The final barb from Mrs. Elton is to be expected and leaves the reader with a sense that all is right in Highbury, with everyone taking their usual places in society.

***Detailed Analysis(Ch52-55):***

Harriet returns from London, and Emma is glad to see how completely she has recovered from her infatuation with Knightley. It is revealed that Harriet’s father is a tradesman, a respectable person, but not the aristocrat that Emma had predicted. Emma receives Mr. Martin at Hartfield, but realizes that her friendship with Harriet must “change into a calmer sort of good-will” because of their different social positions.

Harriet and Mr. Martin are the first of the newly engaged couples to marry (in September); Frank and Jane will be the last (in November). Jane is visiting the Campbells, and she and Frank will live at Enscombe. Emma would like to be married in October, but it seems Mr. Woodhouse will never agree. But when Mrs. Weston’s poultry-house is robbed, Mr. Woodhouse is eager to have Mr. Knightley in the household for protection. The wedding is too modest to please Mrs. Elton, but “the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union.”

Although Emma ends in the traditional manner of a comedy, with a series of weddings to secure everyone’s happiness and reaffirm social ties, the question of whether or not the novel’s ending is truly happy is often posed. Some critics suggest that Emma regresses, rather than develops, at the end of the novel because she exchanges her independence, energy, and wit for a wish “to grow more worthy of him, whose intentions and judgments had been ever so superior to her own . . . that the lessons of her past folly might teach her humility and circumspection in future.” Instead of marrying a man who is her equal, Emma marries a father figure, and, not only will she not be traveling beyond Highbury, she will not even leave her own father’s home. Emma’s and Mr. Knightley’s reminiscences about her childhood remind us that his main role in her life has been as an authority figure and underline the fact that a large portion of her love for him is as someone who can be depended upon to guide her. She is so used to calling him “Mr. Knightley” that she says she will only call him “George” on their wedding day. Emma’s position at the end of the novel is strikingly similar to the position she was in at the beginning.

Also, Emma’s thoughts about Harriet indicate that Emma has grown more selfish. She takes for granted that their differing social positions mean that they must give up their intimacy. She does not seem to regret her decision or miss Harriet, suggesting that the need to adhere to social conventions overwhelms the affection that she has for Harriet. Emma’s thoughts following the revelation of Harriet’s parentage demonstrate that class distinctions have value for Emma apart from their association with personal virtue:

Such was the blood of gentility which Emma had formerly been so ready to vouch for! It was likely to be as untainted, perhaps, as the blood of many a gentleman: but what a connection had she been preparing for Mr. Knightley, or for the Churchills, or even for Mr. Elton! The stain of illegitimacy, unbleached by nobility or wealth, would have been a stain indeed.

In other words, a match between a gentleman and the illegitimate daughter of a tradesperson would be a true contamination. Although at some points the novel seems to entertain the idea that class distinctions might be unfair or unfortunate, ultimately the novel is decidedly conservative. Austen demonstrates that the happiness of a marriage depends upon the couple’s being appropriately matched, rather than one of the parties trying to rise above his or her class background.

***Critical Study:***

The party comes from London, and an hour alone with Harriet proves to Emma that "Robert Martin had thoroughly supplanted Mr. Knightley." Harriet's father is learned to be a well-to-do tradesman, who treats Robert liberally; and in becoming acquainted with Robert, Emma finds him a man of sense and worth.

The first of the three engagements to reach the altar is that of Robert and Harriet in September. In November Jane and Frank are to be married. Emma and George fix upon October, but Mr. Wood-house cannot be induced to consent. As long as he is unhappy about it, Emma feels that she cannot proceed. Fortunately for the betrothed, Mrs. Weston's poultry house is robbed one night of all its turkeys and other poultry yards suffer the same fate. This is tantamount to housebreaking with Mr. Woodhouse, who feels safe only with the male Knightleys, and John must soon return to London! The result is that, with more cheerful consent from her father than Emma could have hoped, the wedding takes place and all hopes and wishes of friends are "fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union."

The good-natured satire on marriage is obvious here, containing, as it does, the irony of how unequal events are related. It is noteworthy, however, that before the "happy ending" the standing social order is fully reasserted: The intimacy between Harriet and Emma "must sink; their friendship must change into a calmer sort of good-will; and, fortunately, what ought to be, and must be, seemed already beginning, and in the most gradual, natural manner." The degree to which Emma now accepts this social order is given rather tongue-in-cheek when she learns of Harriet's parentage and reflects upon her possibly being matched with George or Frank or even Mr. Elton: "The stain of illegitimacy, unbleached by nobility or wealth, would have been a stain indeed."

Emma has come a long way to self-recognition and self-knowledge; the social aberration that resulted from her willful imagination, having failed to mature, is safely past; and the social order of the provincial community settles back to normal. Actually, the reader can see, when he looks back at Miss Austen's characterizations and plot structuring, that neither of the three men would have married Harriet any more than Emma would have had Mr. Elton. Consequently, the supreme irony of the story may be that, though a few characters were for a while upset or in doubt about events, there was never any danger at all of the community social order being subverted. Each couple is paired off in the novel in terms of being of similar social rank and in terms of natural equality — even the Eltons. The ending, then, is "happy" as an ideal union of the social and the natural.

***Critical Analysis:***

Harriet writes to Emma about Robert Martin and admits that she was silly to consider Mr. Knightley. Harriet has learned the truth about her parents: her father was a respectable tradesman who could provide for her stay at [Mrs. Goddard](https://www.gradesaver.com/emma/study-guide/character-list#mrs-goddard)'s school. Emma meets Robert Martin and becomes convinced that Harriet will be happy with him. Harriet marries Robert Martin, Frank Churchill marries Jane Fairfax, and later, after Mr. Woodhouse is placated, Emma marries Mr. Knightley.

Everything is set right in this chapter: Harriet becomes a respectable member of society when she learns of her family connections and finds happiness with Robert Martin. She is, as Emma had hoped, from a decent family and can now enter society without any undue suspicion.

Not surprisingly, Mr. Woodhouse becomes supportive of his daughter's marriage when he realizes that it will benefit his own comfort. He agrees to the marriage after a string of robberies because he thinks that Mr. Knightley's presence at Hartfield will keep him safe.

Emma herself finally fulfills Austen’s expectations and is married to Mr. Knightley. Upon her marriage, she is set to leave Highbury for a vacation to the ocean, the first instance in the novel in which she leaves her home. If Emma has conceded some of her independence to Mr. Knightley and allowed herself to be less than the center of attention, she has opened herself to new experiences and the possibility of a life in which things remain acceptably beyond her control.

***Significance(Ch53-55):***

Emma keeps track of Harriet through Isabella (Harriet is still in London) and grieves because she cannot speak to [Mr. Knightley](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Knightley) about what has actually transpired between them. Mrs. Weston gives birth to her child, and so the couple reveal their engagement to the Westons and [Mr. Woodhouse](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Woodhouse). Soon all of Highbury hears of the engagement. Most everyone is pleased with the match between Emma and Mr. Knightley, although [Mr. Elton](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Elton) says, "She had always meant to catch Knightley if she could," and Mrs. Elton feels sorry for Mr. Knightley and thinks it's "a sad business for him" that he got stuck with Emma.

Mr. Knightley tells Emma that he sent Robert Martin up to London on business with his brother, John Knightley, which gave Mr. Martin an opportunity to socialize with Harriet. As a result, the couple reconciled, and Harriet accepted Mr. Martin's proposal of marriage. Mr. Knightley fears that Emma will object, but she is overjoyed to hear of her friend's happiness. Emma and Mr. Knightley meet Jane and Frank at the Westons' home, and Emma reconciles with Frank. He tells her again that he thought she suspected his liaison with Jane, although he now knows that Emma had no knowledge of it. Frank says he should have told her. Emma teases him about enjoying his deception, which he denies, but she says that if she were in his place, she would have gotten some enjoyment out if it. She says they are alike: "If not in our dispositions ... there is a likeness in our destiny; the destiny which bids fair to connect us with two characters so much superior to our own."

Harriet learns she is the daughter of a wealthy tradesman, and Emma becomes acquainted with Mr. Martin. Emma and Mr. Knightley attend their wedding. Jane and Frank will marry after the mourning period has passed for Mrs. Churchill. Mr. Woodhouse finally gives his consent to Emma's marriage when a poultry thief begins stealing fowl from the neighbors. Mr. Woodhouse is willing to trade a change in his routine for the protection of a son-in-law, and so Emma and Mr. Knightley are united. Mrs. Elton is not impressed with the nuptials and says, "Very little white satin, very few lace veils; a most pitiful business."

In these last chapters, the couples are finally united in matrimony, which is the happy ending to any [Austen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/author/) novel. Even Harriet, seemingly tossed aside in favor of Emma's own happiness, gets a happy ending of her own. Harriet's fortunate reconnection with Robert Martin (no doubt facilitated by the Knightley men) allows her to pick up where she left off with him. The marriage is suitable on both sides, and it takes [Mr. Knightley](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Knightley) a little time to understand that Emma, his bride, has truly changed her opinions on the subject of the yeoman farmer. Regardless of Mr. Martin's social standing, Emma is truly grateful for her friend's happiness. Clearly, Emma has been humbled by both adversity and gratitude.

Emma is doubtful at first about Harriet's commitment to Mr. Martin, but Harriet is, after all, only eighteen by the time the story ends. She probably doesn't love Mr. Martin, but with him there is the potential for fondness to grow into genuine love, and Harriet, who is essentially an orphan, will gain not only a husband, but also a mother and two sisters.

[Frank Churchill](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Frank_Churchill), who is narcissistic like Emma's father, is in love with the beautiful Jane, and it would seem that he may be improved over the years by living in close association with someone of a superior character.

Mr. Knightley is in little need of improvement. Emma will improve in her life with him, not because he will correct her flaws but because he will love her unconditionally, and such a love is a great encouragement for a woman to evolve into her best self.

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

***Summary part 1:***

[Harriet](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) returns to Highbury, her behavior fully convincing [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) that [Mr. Martin](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) has replaced Mr. Knightley in her affections. Emma greets her with heartfelt congratulations. In the course of Harriet’s marriage preparations, she is discovered to have been the illegitimate daughter of a tradesman—an unsuitable match indeed for a gentleman. Emma attends Harriet and Mr. Martin's wedding in September with pleasure, though she feels that their friendship will necessarily and gradually diminish because of their different social stations.

***Analysis part 1:***

Fueled by the revelation of Harriet’s lineage, Emma finally comes to approve the match of Harriet and Mr. Martin, rejoicing in their equality, her friend’s financial security, and Mr. Martin’s virtues. Sadly, Emma’s conviction that their intimacy must diminish given the change in her friend’s social circles reveals she still holds to her prioritization of social class.

***Summary Part 2:***

Jane returns to the [Campbells](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters), where she and [Frank](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill) wait for three months to pass after [Mrs. Churchill](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters)’s death before their wedding in November. [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) and [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley) hope to marry in October. [Mr. Woodhouse](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-woodhouse)’s misery threaten these prospects, but when [Mrs. Weston](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters)’s poultry-house is robbed, he comes to welcome the idea of Mr. Knightley in their house as a very good protection. Emma and Mr. Knightley’s wedding is absent of finery and parade, to the disdain of [Mrs. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters), but all of their intimate friends witness it with great confidence as to the union’s lasting happiness.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Though Jane and Frank are engaged to marry despite some disparity in social situation, the novel devotes the final chapter to the marriages of Harriet and Mr. Martin, and Emma and Mr. Knightley—two matches of equal standing. By focusing on those two marriages at the end of all the messy misperception and blundering, the novel’s moral regarding marriages seems to mirror Emma's own feelings and conservatively advocate openness and equality (in both character and class) as the key to a good match.