***Emma***

***Chapter 14***

***Summary and Analysis***

Summary:

Entering the party, Emma attempts to put Mr. Elton’s strange behavior out of her mind, but his constant hovering presence makes her worry that Mr. John Knightley’s suggestion that Mr. Elton cares for her may be correct. Meanwhile, Mr. Weston announces that Frank Churchill is due to visit in early January. Emma feels some interest in this news because she has half-seriously thought of Frank as a potential suitor, though she does not anticipate giving up her vow to remain single. Mrs. Weston confides to Emma that she has some anxiety about meeting her stepson, and she fears Mrs. Churchill will prevent him from coming. She and Emma speculate about the situation at Enscombe, the Churchill estate, and Emma wonders why a young man should be so dependent upon the impulses of his guardian.

During her visit with the Westons, Mr. Elton continually attempts to be near Emma, who still hopes that she can fix the situation in Harriet’s favor. Emma hears more about Frank Churchill and begins to wonder about the possibility of a match between them. Of all the men that she knows, Frank seems to suit her the best in terms of age, character, and condition.

Analysis:

Emma’s belief that she is different from others cannot merely be attributed to her sense of superiority; it also results from her ambition to make her life more interesting and more useful than the limitations of village life seem to allow. Observing and imagining the destinies of other lives exercises her intellect. We might think of Emma as a kind of novelist creating plots for the characters that people her world. In this sense, she may be closer to Austen than her mistakes would lead us to believe. In fact, Emma is somewhat prudish, afraid to consider marriage for herself, despite her belief that “a good match” is the key to happiness for her friends. Alert to what she believes are the subtleties of flirtation between Harriet and Mr. Elton, she is incapable or unwilling to see that she might be engaging in such social games herself.

At the Weston's Christmas Eve party, Emma suffers from her two companions. Mr. Elton is too eager to please, while Mr. John Knightley is completely unwilling to do so. Despite her growing dislike for Mr. Elton, she remains civil to him, still holding some hope that she can fix the situation. Yet again, Emma demonstrates her best trait and bears every slight or inconvenience without making a mistake in etiquette.

This is the first part of the novel in which Emma actually considers marriage for herself. It is significant that even Emma, who can presumably marry anyone she wants, thinks of marriage in practical terms. Her considerations are age, character, and condition, essentially, the same status considerations that other women must take into account. At no point does Austen mention love. It is even more striking that Emma decides that Frank Churchill would be a suitable husband before even meeting him. She already knows what she needs to know—his age, his status, and his familial connections—and other information is secondary.

Frank Churchill's story echoes that of his late mother. The Churchill family exerted great control and influence over their daughter, cutting her off when she disobeyed their wishes by marrying Mr. Weston. Similarly, Frank Churchill's aunt (who raised him) is very demanding, and seems to prevent him from visiting his father. Some bitterness remains from Mr. Weston's first marriage, and thus the Churchill family wishes to keep Frank away from him when at all possible.

Summary in detail:

Upon their arrival at the Westons' home, Emma's tendency toward enjoyment asserts itself and she determines to think "as little as possible of Mr. Elton's oddities." But he compounds her vexation by placing himself close to her at the first opportunity, and for the first time Emma wonders if John could have been right, if Mr. Elton could be "beginning to transfer his affections from Harriet" to her — an "absurd" idea.

Because of his attentions, she cannot overhear another interesting group conversation; but at dinner, happily released to sit beside Mr. Weston, she learns that Frank Churchill is expected for a visit about the second week in January. Emma is still resolved never to marry, but she has frequently thought "that if she were to marry, he was the very person to suit her in age, character and condition." It is only a thought, however, for she would not give up her present situation for anything. After dinner, with the ladies

retired to the drawing room, Mrs. Weston confirms the news about Frank and voices her doubts about it.

She does not want to be unduly critical but she has heard of Mrs. Churchill's variable and demanding temper, and even Isabella agrees about the character of that lady. Emma is critical of Frank and his delayed visit, but Mrs. Weston tries to defend him. Knowing of his repeated excuses, Emma coolly replies, "I shall not be satisfied, unless he comes."

Analysis in detail:

In terms of plot movement, this chapter does two primary things. It advances the strand involving Mr. Elton, showing more and more to the reader, if not to Emma, what the vicar is up to. In addition it focuses attention more fully than ever upon Frank Churchill, who will enter the story in person in Volume Two and be a main character in the rest of the novel. For the reader, as for the people of Highbury, his character is in doubt; and doubt is calculated to arouse anticipation and expectant interest.

A curious honesty in Emma's self-deception also is given in this chapter. Beginning to wonder about John's statements and Mr. Elton's actions, she can conceive only that Mr. Elton may be starting to transfer his affections from Harriet to herself — not that she has been the object all along. This is, of course, the honesty of obduracy. Interestingly and tantalizingly enough, Emma, ever connected with the theme of marriage, can conceive of Frank as possibly a suitable partner for her even as, in the same mental breath, she reaffirms her resolution of never marrying. These thoughts of hers are also part of the plot movement calculated to foster the reader's expectant interest.

Summary part by part and analysis

Summary part 1:

Upon their arrival at the Westons, [Mr. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) attentively shadows [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse), to her continued dismay. She begins to suspect that [Mr. John Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) may be right about his interest in her. Despite her alarm and vexation at Mr. Elton, she strives to remain civil and ladylike.

Analysis part 1:

The sense of comedy that unfolds as Mr. Elton obsequiously hovers over Emma belies the real harm of the situation. Though Emma may experience only irritation, Harriet’s heart and future is at stake—because of Emma's meddling.

Summary part 2:

[Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) overhears Mr. Weston announce an upcoming visit from his son, [Frank Churchill](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill). She listens with great curiosity, as in spite of her resolution to remain celibate, she has often thought that Frank would be a perfect match for her in age, character, and condition—particularly given their close connection through the Westons—if she were to consider marriage. Thus, she takes an active interest in his affairs and even anticipates a possible dalliance.

Analysis part 2

For the first time, we see Emma’s imagination at work regarding a match for herself. Her mind works with the same fancy, vanity, and social considerations as she does with the other matches: she assesses their connections, age, social class, and accomplishments in concluding that they are suitable for each other.

Summary part 3:

[Mr. Weston](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) mentions to Emma that [Mrs. Weston](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) suspects that [Frank](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill)’s visit will be put off once more, because his son is so dependent upon the ill-tempered and snobbish [Mrs. Churchill](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters)’s favor. Mrs. Weston confides her own worries to Emma: she cannot bear to think Frank at fault, and so she is sure that the Churchills strive to keep him for themselves and object to the visit.

Analysis part 3:

The situation at Enscombe, the Churchills’ estate, reveals the potential dependency of even a “well-off” young gentleman on his guardians’ support. At the same time, we observe the Westons’ determined inability to read any potential flaws in Frank, as they blame all of his delays on Mrs. Churchill.

Summary part 4:

[Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) puzzles over how a young man—particularly one who is such a favorite—should find himself so constrained from visiting his father, though she can conceive of a young woman being powerless under her guardians’ sway. [Mrs. Weston](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters), however, insists that [Mrs. Churchill](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) is so unreasonable that one cannot judge Frank for his delay.

Anlaysis part 4:

With sharp insight, Emma understands the constraints of young ladies to decide their futures, but she feels that something is lacking in explanation or character regarding a young man so dependent on his guardian. Here, as in other cases in the novel, we see that those outside the situation may perceive it more objectively than those intimately involved.

Quotations and explanation:

Quotation 1:

A young woman, if she fall into bad hands, may be teazed, and kept at a distance from those she wants to be with; but one cannot comprehend a young man's being under such restraint, as not to be able to spend a week with his father, if he likes it. (14.24)

Explanation:

Austen’s female characters frequently reflect on the different possibilities available to different genders. In this case, Emma reflects upon the utter economic dependence of women upon their caretakers.