***Emma***

***Chapter 15***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

Tea begins after dinner at Randalls and much fun is had by everyone but Mr. Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley. They are both concerned about the weather and the prospect of making it back home safely.

Throughout the night Mr. Elton clings to Emma, making Mr. John Knightley's advice seem true. A snowstorm sets in and after much discussion everyone decides to leave Randalls.

Emma ends up riding in a carriage alone with Mr. Elton, who confesses his undying affection for her. Emma rebuffs him and they argue over Harriet. Mr. Elton leaves the carriage in a huff and Emma is shocked by his apparent lack of manners.

***Analysis:***

The third part of the dinner party is very revealing, as Mr. Elton's true affections are made known. Emma's shock and remorse at having misled Harriet are keen, and she regrets her matchmaking attempts.

We begin to see that Emma might be reconsidering her attempts at matchmaking, and her avowal never to marry. Emma begins to think that a match with the elusive Mr. Churchill might be very right for her.

***Summary in detail:***

When the gentlemen join the ladies in the drawing room, Mr. Elton immediately seats himself on the sofa between Emma and Mrs. Weston and becomes so vocally anxious about Emma's escaping the throat infection that, in her vexation, she admits that his entreaties appear "exactly like the pretence of being in love with her, instead of Harriet."

John comes in with the information that snow now covers the ground and more is coming fast. This naturally upsets poor Mr. Woodhouse, and everyone wonders what must be done. Always sensible and practical, George, who has slipped out to investigate, returns to say that nowhere is the snow more than half an inch deep and that travel will be easy for at least another hour. He and Emma quickly settle the question and order the carriages brought around. To her further vexation Emma finds herself alone in the second carriage with Mr. Elton.

The three-quarter-mile trip is hardly begun when the vicar seizes her hand and declares his adoring love and need of her, "ready to die" if she refuses him. When she deliberately but delicately brings up the name of Harriet, he is amazed but resumes his own passion, "urgent for a favourable answer." Struck by his inconstancy and presumption, she accuses him of misbehavior toward Harriet, whereupon he says, "I never thought of Miss Smith in the whole course of my existence — never paid her any attentions, but as your friend." Pressing his point, he makes clear that he thinks Harriet is beneath him and declares that he has received encouragement from Emma herself. Emma denies this, upbraids him for his attitude toward Harriet, and flatly states, "I have no thoughts of matrimony at present." The rest of the trip is spent in angry silence. After leaving him at the vicarage, the carriage takes her to Hartfield, where she finds everyone in peace and comfort — everyone except herself.

***Analysis in detail:***

The action of this chapter is the external climax of Volume One, and the action speaks pretty much for itself. The fiasco of a proposal is in contrast to the comfortable domesticity all around it; and as a real emotional mishap on the return trip home, it stands out in ironic relief against the earlier apprehensions of physical misadventure on the snow-covered road.

The concluding incident of the chapter marks the beginning of revelation and self-revelation for Emma. The situation constitutes a point of extreme testing of an imaginative young lady, and in spite of a hesitant moment or two, she meets the event with superb outward control. It is also worth noting that her conviction of his "presumption" comes, if we are to judge from her total reactions to him up to this point in the story, as much from a sense of incompatibility as from a sense of social levels, though she would probably feel that the two are inseparable.

This chapter also contains some sharp insights into the social life in Austen's England. A light snow is enough to keep the guests of the Westons from possibly leaving, and to walk in such weather, as Isabella suggests that she could do, is unthinkable. Travel, even between two relatively close estates, can be arduous if conditions are not perfect.

Mr. Elton reveals himself to be far less sympathetic than before. When he contrives to be in the same carriage with Emma, he arranges a very private encounter with her outside of normally accepted social space. This is the first instance in the novel in which Emma is alone with a man (whenever Mr. Knightley visits, her father is always nearby), and the enclosed space of the carriage heightens the intimacy of the encounter. His protestations to Emma show that he deliberately feigned an interest in Harriet to be close to Emma, and his quick dismissal of Harriet as not of his rank shows a petty snobbery.

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

***Summary part 1:***

At the party, [Mr. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) continues to hover around [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse). He irritates her by expressing greater concern regarding Harriet’s sickness for Emma's sake rather than her friend’s. She finds his behavior offensive and presumptuous.

***Analysis part 1:***

Emma finds Mr. Elton’s attentions to her presumptuous and upsetting: he is not her equal, and his behavior disturbs her matchmaking fantasy for Harriet.

***Summary part 2:***

[Mr. John Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) announces that the heavy snow will soon make it impossible to travel. [Mr. Woodhouse](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-woodhouse) and Isabella are horrified at the prospect of traversing through the storm. The party quickly breaks up, with Mr. Woodhouse, Isabella, and Mr. John Knightley in one carriage, and Emma followed into another by [Mr. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters).

***Analysis part 2***

Mr. Woodhouse and Isabella’s sensitivity to the slightest disturbances demonstrates how sheltered they are as high-class individuals. They have little conception of real disasters and fret over any changes to their everyday routines.

***Summary part 3***:

To [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse)’s horror, once they are alone in the carriage, [Mr. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) immediately proceeds to declare his love for her with extravagant language, and proposes. Emma assumes he must be drunk, and she reminds him of his love for Harriet. Mr. Elton responds with great surprise, and Emma loses her temper at his inconstancy and presumption.

***Analysis part 3:***

To the very end, Emma is unable to see the obvious: even when Mr. Elton reveals his intentions towards her, she assumes her prior perception of his attentions was accurate, and that he must be drunk and inconstant.

***Summary part 4:***

[Mr. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) insists that he has been interested in [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) all along, and that Harriet has never even crossed his mind. He insinuates that Emma cannot seriously have doubted him, and that she has long known of and encouraged his intentions.

***Anlaysis part 4:***

Just as Emma has been interpreting Mr. Elton’s behavior according to her fancy, he has been reading her encouragement according to his desires.

***Summary Part 5:***

When the extent of their misunderstanding becomes clear, [Mr. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) is in turn offended that Emma should pair him with Harriet, whom he believes below him. Emma denies that she has given him any encouragement and firmly rejects him. They travel the rest of the way in silence, both greatly angry and offended.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Mr. Elton dismisses Harriet for the same reasons that Emma desire that Harriet dismiss Mr. Martin: he believes her to be of an inferior social class. Just as Emma takes offense at his presumption in proposing to her, he takes offense at her presumption in pairing him with Harriet.

***Quotations and explanation:***

***Quotation 1:***

Miss Smith is a very good sort of girl; and I should be happy to see her respectably settled. I wish her extremely well and, no doubt, there are men who might not object to—Every body has their level but as for myself, I am not, I think, quite so much at a loss. (15.36)

***Explanation:***

Even Mr. Elton has a strong sense of how Harriet fits into a social hierarchy. Emma’s affection (and her determination) blinds her as to Harriet’s prospects.

***Quotation 2:***

But, Miss Smith, indeed!—Oh! Miss Woodhouse! who can think of Miss Smith, when Miss Woodhouse is near! (15.32)

***Explanation:***

Mr. Elton taps into a common thread of Emma’s assessment of her own value.