***Emma***

***Chapter 17***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

Mr. John Knightley and his family take leave of Hartfield and Mr. Woodhouse is very much upset. Mr. Elton sends a letter to Mr. Woodhouse informing him that he will be departing for Bath right away with the intention of staying for a few weeks. Emma is not mentioned in the letter, and she worries that her father will notice this. Instead, Mr. Woodhouse fixates on his worry that Mr. Elton will not return.

Emma finally reveals the truth about Mr. Elton to Harriet, who is quite upset with the news. Instead of blaming Mr. Elton, she deems herself unworthy of his attention anyway. Emma resolves to make her comfortable at Hartfield and to keep her mind occupied away from Mr. Elton. Emma realizes that Harriet is superior to her in some ways because she is artless and sincere in her emotions. She also discovers that Harriet was more resolutely in love with Mr. Elton than she had foreseen.  Emma’s sense of her own failures, and Harriet’s modesty and sweetness in taking the news, give Emma the temporary impression that Harriet, rather than herself, is “the superior creature.” She moves Harriet to Hartfield and attempts to comfort her and drive Elton out of Harriet’s mind. Emma tries to prepare Harriet for the inevitable moment when they will see Elton in their social circle after he returns from Bath.

The chapter ends with Emma deciding that she will not rest until she has found someone else to make Harriet happy.

***Analysis:***

Once again, we are treated to the humorous diversion of Mr. Woodhouse's tendency to be a worrywart. Emma does her best to placate him, and as usual, gets her way.

Her decision to set Harriet up with someone else tells us that there is certainly more intrigue awaiting poor Harriet, which will be revealed in the forthcoming chapters.

Austen continues to form her characters throughout the remainder of Volume 1, and she does not seem to be afraid to let them grow and mature. This is somewhat unusual, since many author's characters are stagnant and do not change throughout a story line.

 In this chapter, [Jane Austen](https://www.gradesaver.com/author/jane-austen) contrasts Emma and Harriet in a different manner than she has at early points in the novel. The earlier distinction between the two is that, while Emma has fortune, wit and talents, Harriet is gullible and foolish. Yet in this situation, Austen makes clear that Harriet Smith is unspoiled and has a sincere and pure heart. This relates back to Mr. Knightley's earlier warnings about Emma's influence on Harriet. Might Emma cause Harriet to lose those qualities that make her, in some small way, Emma's equal? The contrast between Emma and Harriet causes Emma to question her own value. This is not a minor point: for the first time Emma begins to realize that she may lack some quality.

It is also notable that Mr. Elton leaves Highbury so soon after Emma rejects him. There are a number of possible motives for this, including embarrassment. However, his claim that he will visit friends during his absence leads back to an earlier comment by Mr. Knightley, who suspected that Mr. Elton already had a romantic attachment to a young lady who lived elsewhere. The purpose of the trip may be to secure that relationship.

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

***Summary part 1:***

Mr. John Knightley and [Isabella](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) depart from Hartfield, despite [Mr. Woodhouse](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-woodhouse)’s attempt to persuade “poor Isabella” to remain behind. The narrator reflects that “poor Isabella,” whose life revolves around doting on her family, is in fact a model of “right feminine happiness.”

***Analysis part 1:***

Though Mr. Woodhouse’s projection of his own sadness at Isabella's having left him onto Isabella, who is happily married to a wealthy man, is comical, the humor also reflects the confines for women in Austen’s era—the luckiest of whose lives often revolved solely around husband and children.

***Summary part 2:***

[Mr. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) sends a very formal, cold [letter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/symbols/letters) to [Mr. Woodhouse](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-woodhouse)—completely ignoring any address to [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse)—announcing his departure for several weeks to Bath. Grateful for his absence, Emma resolves to break the dreadful news to [Harriet](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) immediately, to give her as much time as possible to recover before he returns.

***Analysis part 2***

The complete change in Mr. Elton’s manner towards Emma reveals his resentment and lack of grace in the face of her rejection. It will later be contrasted by Mr. Martin’s gracious treatment of Harriet in spite of her rejection, once again raising the question of what comprises "class" and "manners."

***Summary part 3***:

Harriet responds with unaffected tears, and [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) admires her humility and grace in receiving the news. Harriet blames no one; she continues to believe [Mr. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) “all perfection” and Emma faultless.

***Analysis part 3:***

In a reversal of her previous manner of thinking, Emma acknowledges Harriet’s superiority in responding to the mess that Emma has made.

***Summary part 4:***

[Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) leaves feeling humbled, and she strives to find a better way to help her friend than matchmaking. She moves [Harriet](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) to Hartfield for the remainder of her emotional recovery and attempts to comfort and distract her from thoughts of [Mr. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters). Emma anticipates the awkwardness Harriet’s encounter with Mr. Elton upon his return, an inevitability in their confined social circles, and she attempts to prepare Harriet accordingly.

***Anlaysis part 4:***

Emma demonstrates real disinterested kindness and remorse towards her friend. She knows, better than Harriet, Mr. Elton’s flaws and the unfolding social situation. She anticipates his coming coldness towards Harriet, and she attempts to prepare her friend for the pains of their next encounter with him.

***Quotations and explanation:***

***Quotation 1:***

Isabella, passing her life with those she doated on, full of their merits, blind to their faults, and always innocently busy, might have been a model of right feminine happiness. (17.1)

***Explanation:***

Isabella may be a perfect woman, but she’s not a very interesting one. There’s a reason why Emma is the protagonist of this story.