***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:***

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:***

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.