***Emma***

***Chapter 18***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

Mr. Frank Churchill, much to the dismay of the Westons, will not be visiting Randalls as planned. Although Mr. Weston makes the best of this news Mrs. Weston is quite distraught. The continued avoidance of Mr. Churchill worries her that her husband is being hurt unnecessarily.

Emma, although trying to lie low from love for a while, commiserates with the Westons as she feels she should. Although she does not really feel any dismay at the delay of Mr. Churchill's arrival, she pretends to for the sake of Mrs. Weston.

Mr. Knightley and Emma discuss Mr. Churchill at length and it is revealed that Mr. Knightley doesn't think very highly of a man who will not stand up to his aunt and say that he is visiting his father. Mr. Knightley and Emma disagree on what is proper and she defends Mr. Churchill to the best of her ability.

***Analysis(16-18):***

Another interesting aspect of Emma's character is revealed as she lies about her dismay over Mr. Churchill's delay. It was quite common at the time to put on a good front and act the role you were supposed to play, according to your friends and your stature in society. Emma is no exception.

Mr. Knightley's dislike of Mr. Churchill is quite interesting as he seems to have developed it despite never meeting the man. He is the one person in Highbury who is not enthralled by Mr. Churchill's letters, revealing that he is truly an independent thinker.

Chapter 16 is remarkable because, unlike most of the novel’s other chapters, it deals almost exclusively with Emma’s thoughts and feelings, her inner life. On the whole, Emma seems to have gained a measure of understanding, but the narrator has provided hints that she has more to learn. We see her grow in humility and selflessness as, shaken by Elton’s proposal, she thinks that she would have gladly undergone an even greater blow to her ego, if only she could have avoided hurting Harriet. In addition to increased self-understanding, Emma shows an increased understanding of Elton’s character as “proud, assuming, conceited; very full of his own claims, and little concerned about the feelings of others.”

However, Emma has not totally shed her former shortcomings. Emma’s resolution to cease matchmaking is put in terms that suggest she has gained a good deal of insight: “It was foolish, it was wrong, to take so active a part in bringing two people together. It was adventuring too far, assuming too much, making light of what ought to be serious—a trick of what ought to be simple.” But soon she is imagining new matches for Harriet, though she stops herself with the recognition of her own relapse. Emma’s reflection that “there had been no real affection either in [Elton’s] language or manners” shows her continued sense of the superiority of her mind and manners to Elton’s. She blames Elton probably more than he deserves for her own mistakes, and her quick assumption that his feelings for her were insincere seems self-serving. Her revised understanding of Elton is accurate, but her refusal to implicate herself as party to his misunderstanding shows that Emma’s self-understanding is not complete.

Without having met Frank Churchill, Emma has already decided that he is a wonderful person. When she quarrels with Mr. Knightley about Frank, she automatically assumes that Frank has good intentions and is perfectly honorable. Mr. Knightley, in contrast, suspects Frank Churchill to be lazy and dishonorable. Since Mr. Knightley tends to echo Austen's own views and predict character flaws, his objections must raise some doubt about Frank Churchill. Whatever influence that the Churchills have on Frank, he is still a grown man and can make decisions for himself; the Churchills can only do so much to prevent him from visiting his father.

Once again, the issues of social status and decorum are important considerations. Mr. Knightley assumes that one of the Churchills' great mistakes with Frank is making him believe that he is above his actual connections: he is too proud, luxurious, and selfish for his status in society. Frank Churchill therefore joins Harriet Smith and Mr. Elton as characters chastised for not knowing their proper place in society. In addition, Mr. Knightley claims that Frank Churchill may lead a disreputable life dedicated only to the pursuit of pleasure. In other words, he does not behave with the sense of honor and decency that a man of his situation should.

***Detailed Summary(17-18):***

With improved weather the John Knightleys leave for London, and on the same evening a note comes from Mr. Elton to Mr. Woodhouse, stating that at the entreaties of friends he is leaving in the morning for Bath and will not get to come by Hartfield before he goes. This is agreeably surprising news for Emma, for it leaves her relatively free to approach Harriet, to whom she goes the very next day. Her confession of events renews her first shame and brings tears from Harriet. In her simplicity and modesty Harriet will not complain, and her reaction impresses Emma, who is "really for the time convinced that Harriet was the superior creature of the two." Considering that her second duty is to promote Harriet's comfort, Emma gets her to Hartfield for needed kindness and amusement. Nonetheless, Harriet's continued belief that Mr. Elton is "all perfection" proves that she is "more resolutely in love than Emma had foreseen." Emma realizes that, until Harriet is cured, there can be "no true peace for herself."

Frank Churchill does not come in January after all, and Mrs. Weston is exceedingly disappointed. Emma is otherwise too involved to care much about Frank at the moment; but in putting on a false concern to cover her other feelings, she tells George about the further delay by Frank and says a good deal more than she feels. This leads to a disagreement with George, who thinks that Frank is avoiding his duty, and Emma is amused to perceive herself taking a side that is not in accord with her real opinion. Emma states that, in light of all the long conjectures about Frank and his coming, her idea of him is that "he can adapt his conversation to the taste of everybody" and be universally agreeable. George's reply is that, if he turns out to be anything like that, "he will be the most insufferable fellow breathing!" Emma is quite surprised at the degree of his vexation, at what seems to be genuine anger. To dislike a young man only because he appears of a different disposition from himself is "unworthy the real liberality of mind which she was always used to acknowledge in him." Never before has she supposed he could be "unjust to the merit of another."

***Detailed Analysis(17-18):***

These two chapters represent the denouement following the climax of Volume One. This leveling-off action, obviously in a lower key than that of the two climactic chapters immediately preceding, for the moment tidies up the remaining threads of the dominant plot action of the first volume. Since Mr. Elton's part in this action is finished, he is removed from the locale. Emma makes her call upon Harriet and starts trying to mend the situation for her. The present possibility of a visit from Frank Churchill is terminated. Thus the first volume concludes a developing series of significant events through which inwardly the principal characters have been changed but which leaves their outward, material circumstances essentially unaltered, at least among themselves as a fixed social group. Each of the characters primarily

involved — Emma, Harriet, Mr. Elton, George Knightley — is no closer to marrying one of the others than at the beginning of the volume. This outward non-change, then, focuses the spotlight of significance upon the inward change: And because of the limited point of view taken in the novel, the major portion of this change belongs to Emma, coming by way of revelation. Mr. Elton's revelation of his passion is important primarily because it leads Emma to a revelation about herself. Because of her self-deception she has deluded and misjudged others, and her shock of recognition — the long thoughts before going to bed and during the following days — is basically the (in this case unpleasant) discovery of the self.

In rounding out this volume, however, the author has prepared for much of what is to follow. There has been occasional mention of Jane Fairfax, of course, who is yet to be seen. But here in the denouement quite a bit of attention is directed toward Frank Churchill, who is also yet to come upon the scene. And to the perceptive reader the terminal and unusual reaction of George Knightley to Emma's interest in Frank, while it is presented with subtle artlessness and near offhandedness, will have its significance in both its final emphatic position and in the fact and object of his anger.

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

***Summary part 1:***

[Mrs. Weston](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters)’s fears are realized as [Frank Churchill](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill) fails to visit, sending another letter of excuse. Emma sympathizes with and tries to ease Mrs. Weston's disappointment.

***Analysis part 1:***

Frank’s repeated substitution of his presence with letters continues the mystery surrounding his character, while raising questions about the sincerity of his elaborately written regrets.

***Summary part 2:***

When, later, Emma rather disingenuously exclaims to [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley) about the [Churchills](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters)’ fault for disappointing the [Westons](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters), Mr. Knightley voices her previous sentiment: a young man should not be so restricted by his guardians. He suspects that [Frank](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill) could come if he liked in spite of the Churchills’ wishes, but is not because of his own indifference towards his lower connections.

***Analysis part 2***

Mr. Knightley and Emma’s sensibility allows them to note the strangeness of Frank’s inability to visit, but Mr. Knightley comes down with far greater condemnation for the young man. He believes every man’s duty must be carried out with resolution and vigor.

***Summary part 3***:

[Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) counters that [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley) has never known dependency and cannot judge it; others are restricted by their family obligations and parental tempers. Mr. Knightley insists that a sensible man can—and should—always do his duty through vigor and resolution. Mr. Knightley declares that [Frank](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill)’s fancy [letters](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/symbols/letters) are excuses from doing what is right. He finds them disgusting and anticipates that their writer is likely to be pretentious and insufferable.

***Analysis part 3:***

Emma’s counterargument reveals her own female insight into dependency; as a woman, she is restricted by family and upbringing in ways that Mr. Knightley has never experienced and has little sympathy with. Though we are used to Mr. Knightley’s superiority of judgment, here Emma’s perspective reveals a greater sensitivity to the restrictions others may face.

***Summary part 4:***

Emma anticipates that [Frank](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill) will be charming and to everyone’s taste. She concludes that they are both prejudiced, she for him, and [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley) against him. Mr. Knightley heatedly and unconvincingly denies any prejudice. Emma remains bewildered by Mr. Knightley’s unfounded dislike towards Frank, as she believes he possesses a fair and liberal mind.

***Anlaysis part 4:***

For the first time, Mr. Knightley’s judgment appears more prejudiced than Emma’s. His denial of any prejudice and Emma’s ready acknowledgement of her own reverses the usual pattern of their self-awareness in favor of Emma.

***Quotations and explanation:***

***Quotation 1:***

No, Emma, your amiable young man can be amiable only in French, not in English. He may be very 'aimable,' have very good manners, and be very agreeable; but he can have no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people: nothing really amiable about him." (18.28)

***Explanation:***

Mr. Knightley’s allusion to French standards of manners suggests his wisdom in recognizing different codes of conduct – and implies that he’s a true English gentleman.

***Quotation 2:***

[…] where little minds belong to rich people in authority, I think they have a knack of swelling out, till they are quite as unmanageable as great ones. (18.21)

***Explanation:***

Emma displays precocious knowledge of the dangers of wealth – even if she never seems to question the dangers of her own (similar) situation.