

Emma



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JANE AUSTEN

Jane Austen was the seventh child of the parish rector in the town of Steventon, where she and her family resided until moving to Bath in 1801. Though her parents were members of the English gentry, they remained relatively poor. Modest to a fault about the value of her work, Jane Austen nevertheless produced some of the enduring masterpieces of English literature, including the novels [Pride and Prejudice](#), [Sense and Sensibility](#), *Emma*, and [Persuasion](#). Her novels were published anonymously until after her death, when her authorship became known. While it was not unheard of for women to publish under their own names in Austen's lifetime, it was still a rarity. Despite the fact that her books focus on the intricate rituals of courtship and marriage among the British middle class, Austen herself remained single throughout her life, preferring the life of a writer over that of a wife and hostess.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Austen's novels are famous for the way they seem to exist in a small, self-contained universe. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Austen's depiction of life in the tranquil English countryside takes place at the same time when England was fighting for its life against the threat of Napoleon, and all of Europe was embroiled in war and political chaos.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Between the late 18th and early 19th centuries, English literature underwent a dramatic transition. The 18th century had seen the rise of the novel in the works of writers like Daniel Defoe (*Moll Flanders*) and Samuel Richardson (*Pamela*). These novels focused on broad social issues of morality and domestic manners. With the turn of the century and the rise of Romanticism, however, the novel began to explore human relationships with a greater degree of emotional complexity. Neither a Classicist nor a Romantic, Jane Austen is perhaps best thought of as a pioneering figure in the development of the novel, providing the bridge from the often didactic novels of an earlier era to the great works of psychological realism of the Victorian period by writer such as George Eliot and Thomas Hardy.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Emma*
- **When Written:** 1814-1815

- **Where Written:** Chawton, England
- **When Published:** 1815
- **Literary Period:** Classicism / Romanticism
- **Genre:** Comedy of manners
- **Setting:** Highbury (fictional village) and at Box Hill, North Surrey, all in England.
- **Climax:** Emma's revelation that she loves Mr. Knightley
- **Antagonist:** There is no real antagonist in the novel; Emma's greatest enemy is her own vanity and pride in her powers of discernment.
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

"A Heroine . . . No One But Myself Will Much Like." Jane Austen expressed ambivalence regarding the reception of *Emma*. She wrote, "I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like." After she finished the novel, she predicted, "to those readers who have preferred [Pride and Prejudice](#) it will appear inferior in wit, and to those who preferred [Mansfield Park](#) very inferior in good sense." Nonetheless, *Emma* is thought of by some critics to be Austen's most representative and complex novel, the last work that she published during her lifetime.

A Modern Adaptation. On July 19, 1995, Paramount Pictures released *Clueless*, an American comedy film adaptation of *Emma* set in Beverley Hills. Directed by Amy Heckerling and produced by Scott Rudin, the film transports the social hierarchy of Highbury to contemporary American high school culture. It became a sleeper hit, grossing over \$11 million on its opening weekend, and receiving great reviews from critics.



PLOT SUMMARY

Rich, beautiful, and privileged Emma Woodhouse fancies herself to be an excellent matchmaker. When her governess marries the well-to-do widower Mr. Weston, a match that Emma views herself to have made, Emma befriends the lower class Harriet Smith and sets out to similarly assist her. She is convinced that her friend deserves a gentleman, though Harriet's own parentage is unknown. She coaxes Harriet into rejecting Mr. Martin, a farmer whom Emma believes below Harriet, and she instead encourages her friend to admire Mr. Elton, the neighborhood vicar.

Mr. Knightley, a long-time friend and Emma's brother-in-law, discourages Emma's matchmaking efforts. It turns out that all the signs that Emma has been interpreting as evidence of Mr.

Elton's interest in Harriet were in fact intended for Emma herself. Harriet is heartbroken, and Emma mortified. Humiliated by Emma's rejection of him and her attempt to pair him with Harriet, Mr. Elton retires to Bath. Emma realizes that personal pride in her judgment and her desires for Harriet blinded her to the real situation. She resolves to never play matchmaker in the future.

Meanwhile, Jane Fairfax, another accomplished and beautiful young woman, returns to Highbury to visit her aunt and grandmother, Miss Bates and Mrs. Bates. Orphaned at an early age, Jane has been educated by her father's friends, the Campbells. She is expected to become a governess, as she has no independent fortune. Emma greets her arrival with mixed admiration and jealousy, as another favorite within their social circle. Emma also suspects Jane's romantic involvement with her friend's husband, Mr. Dixon.

Mr. Weston's son, Frank Churchill is also expected to visit after many delays. He lives with his snobbish aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Churchill, in London. Emma anticipates his arrival with pleasure and finds him charming. Mr. Knightley, on the other hand, immediately dislikes him as superficial and silly. Frank's flattering attentions soon single Emma out as the object of his choice. Mr. Elton returns from Bath with his new bride, the self-important Mrs. Elton, who takes a liking to Jane and distaste for Emma.

Misperception abounds, as various characters speculate over developing romances. [Word games](#), [riddles](#), and [letters](#) provide fodder for mixed interpretations of who loves whom. Emma enjoys Frank's attention, but ultimately decides he is not for her. Mrs. Weston suspects a match between Mr. Knightley and Jane, which Emma vehemently dismisses. Mr. Knightley saves Harriet from social humiliation, asking her to dance when Mr. Elton snubs her. Emma encourages what she believes to be Harriet's developing interest in Frank, who long ago saved Harriet from the gypsies.

Everyone regards Frank and Emma as a match, but Mr. Knightley suspects Frank's interest in Jane and warns Emma. Emma laughingly dismisses his warning, believing she knows the secrets of each character's heart. When Mr. Knightley reprimands her for mocking the harmless Miss Bates, however, she feels great remorse and resolves to improve her behavior to the Bateses.

Mrs. Churchill dies, setting in motion the shocking revelation that Frank and Jane have been secretly engaged. Frank's courtship of Emma was a cover to hide his true attachment, which his aunt opposed. Through a series of painful misunderstandings, Jane broke off their engagement and was about to take up a governess position. Frank frantically obtained his uncle's approval to marry her, and the two reconciled.

Emma also misperceived Harriet's interest in Frank, as Harriet reveals herself to be in love with Mr. Knightley. In turn, Emma's distress over this revelation triggers her own realization that she, too, is in love with Mr. Knightley. Emma feels considerable anguish over her various misperceptions about Frank, Jane, Harriet, and herself. She reproves herself for being blinded by her own desires and self-interest.

Emma fears that Mr. Knightley will confess his love for Harriet, but to her surprise and delight, he declares his love for Emma. Emma happily accepts Mr. Knightley's proposal, and she later has the opportunity of reflecting with Frank that, despite their many blunders, they have both been luckier than they deserve in their beloveds. Emma is further cheered upon learning that Harriet has accepted a second proposal from Mr. Martin. The novel concludes with three marriages: Harriet and Mr. Martin, Jane and Frank, and Emma and Mr. Knightley—the final match which is celebrated as a happy union of equals.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Emma Woodhouse – The protagonist of the novel, Emma Woodhouse is the rich, beautiful, and privileged mistress of Hartfield. She lives a comfortable life with her elderly father, running the house and organizing social invitations within the high society of Highbury. Her mother died when she was young, and she was since spoiled by her governess, the newly married Mrs. Weston. At the start of the novel, her major flaw is a combination of vanity and pride: she thinks a little too highly of herself and believes herself possessed of great discernment in matchmaking. Despite these flaws, Emma's understanding and good nature allow her to learn from her mistakes and cultivate kindness and humility. Her resolution to remain single also demonstrates an unusual prioritization of her independence and pleasure as a woman, though it is one that she later gives up in marrying Mr. Knightley.

Mr. George Knightley – The long-time friend and trusted confidante of the Woodhouses, Emma's brother-in-law. Mr. Knightley is a true gentleman in lineage, estate, and virtue. He lives at Donwell Abbey, the spacious estate that he manages. He displays integrity and charity, as he constantly uses his resources—whether it is his position, his carriage, or his apples—to assist others. He is the only character who openly critiques Emma, demonstrating his dedication to her moral development. His judgment is well respected and, though not entirely biased by his self-interest, he nonetheless proves to be more discerning than many of the other characters in the novel.

Frank Churchill – Mr. Weston's son and Mrs. Weston's stepson. Raised by his aunt and uncle in Enscombe, Frank is anticipated as a suitor for Emma, though his real love is Jane. His lively spirit and charms render him immediately likeable,

but he also reveals himself to be rather thoughtless, deceitful, and selfish. He carelessly interprets Emma's behavior in a manner convenient to himself, and he petulantly disregards Jane's feelings. However, like Emma, Frank possesses an improvable disposition and good understanding and ultimately desires to do what is right for those he loves.

Jane Fairfax – Miss Bates's niece and Mrs. Bates's granddaughter. As another accomplished and beautiful young woman of similar age, Jane incites Emma's jealousy and admiration. Her reserved temperament frustrates Emma, even as Emma admires Jane's elegance of look and manner. Jane's lack of fortune and good family leave her dependent on the good will of others and force her to seek employment, but her marriage to Frank saves her from the latter fate.

Mr. Woodhouse – Emma's father and the Woodhouse patriarch. Mr. Woodhouse is a rather silly, excessively nervous, and frail old man who dotes on his daughter. He hates change and possesses a narrow-minded and even selfish outlook on changes like his oldest daughter's marriage, which he views as a tragedy depriving him of familiar and beloved company. However, Emma and his close friends not only humor, but also comfort him in all of his foibles.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Harriet Smith – A sweet-looking young woman of uncertain parentage who boards at Mrs. Goddard's school. Harriet is pretty and good-tempered, but simple-minded. She adores Emma, who socially takes her under her wing.

Mrs. Weston – Formerly Emma's governess and beloved companion, Miss Taylor marries Mr. Weston to become Mrs. Weston at the novel's start. She is kind and dedicated to Emma, whom she has pampered as a child.

Mr. Weston – Husband to Mrs. Weston and owner of Randalls. Mr. Weston is agreeable and sociable, delighting in his friends and his son by a previous marriage, Frank Churchill.

Mr. Elton – The vicar of Highbury. Well-respected and generally liked, Mr. Elton initially seems like an agreeable, if somewhat fawning, young man. However, his subsequent behavior towards Harriet reveals him to be conceited and superficial.

Mr. Robert Martin – A young farmer living at Abbey-Mill Farm with his mother and sisters. Mr. Martin is sensible, good-hearted, and generous, and though he comes from a lower class of farmers, Mr. Knightley attributes some virtues of real gentility to him in his kindness.

Miss Bates – The middle-aged spinster aunt of Jane Fairfax. Miss Bates is a middle-aged, garrulous spinster with neither beauty, nor fortune, nor wit. However, her good temperament and kindness render her generally well liked in the neighborhood.

Mrs. Bates – Miss Bates's mother and Jane's grandmother.

Isabella Knightley – Emma's older sister and Mr. John Knightley's wife.

Mr. John Knightley – Mr. Knightley's brother and Emma's brother-in-law.

Mrs. Elton – Mr. Elton's wife from Bath, formerly Miss Augusta Hawkins. Mrs. Elton lands on the scene as a self-important, vain, and vulgar woman, and very full of what she has (which is limited to some fortune and a rich brother-in-law).

Mrs. Churchill – Frank Churchill's aunt and guardian, and Mr. Weston's former sister-in-law. Mrs. Churchill is a snobbish and domineering woman who exerts considerable influence over her husband and Frank.

Mr. Churchill – Mrs. Churchill's husband and Frank's guardian.

Colonel Campbell – Jane's guardian and adoptive parent who cares for Jane after his friend—Jane's father—dies in combat.

Mrs. Dixon – Colonel Campbell's daughter and Jane's childhood friend.

Mr. Dixon – Husband to the Campbell's daughter. Emma suspects that there was a romantic involvement between Jane and Mr. Dixon, prior to his marriage.

Mrs. Goddard – Mistress of the local boarding school where Harriet Smith boards.

Mr. Perry – Mr. Woodhouse's favored doctor in the neighborhood.

Elizabeth Martin – Mr. Martin's sister and Harriet's friend, during their early acquaintance.

Mr. and Mrs. Cole – A nouveau-riche family of tradespeople. Emma considers the Coles to be below her social set, and she desires to teach them a lesson about their inferior social standing by turning down their dinner invitation.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



SOCIAL CLASS

Emma, like most of Austen's novels, is a study in 18th Century English society and the significance of propriety. The rich and "well-bred" control the social situations, issuing and initiating invitations and friendships. Those of low social standing depend upon the charity and initiative of those in the higher class. When violations of this order occur, they are often met with great

indignation by those of genteel-breeding, as when Emma takes offense at Mrs. Elton presuming to nickname Mr. Knightley.

Social class also dictates the social obligations between the characters, and the way in which their actions respond to these obligations reveals their character. The novel, for instance, teases out the nuances of charity regarding class: Emma is charitable towards the poor, but shows little initiative in befriending the orphaned and talented Jane.

The characters' use or abuse of their social standing reveals much about their kindness or cruelty. For instance, Emma's exercise of wit at the expense of the silly, but low-standing Miss Bates is condemned as cruel by Mr. Knightley because it is an abuse of her social clout. Humiliating the hapless Miss Bates sets a bad example for those in society who would follow her example. On the other hand, Mr. Knightley's asking Harriet to dance after she has been snubbed by Mr. Elton is an act of charity, graciousness, and chivalry because he is of a high social standing in comparison to both her and Mr. Elton. His act socially "saves" Harriet and reprimands the Eltons for their rudeness.

Social class also restricts the actions that characters are able to take in fulfilling their desires, as is most evidently seen in the novel's drama regarding marriage matches. Frank must conceal his engagement with Jane because she is an orphan and regarded as an unsuitable social match by his family. Harriet rejects Robert Martin because Emma advises her that he is "beneath" her. Mr. Elton rejects Harriet by the same calculations, and so on.



MARRIAGE

Emma deals with many visions of what marriage entails. Social acceptability, financial practicality, similar social standing, shared virtues, matching

talents, comparable charm and beauty, and similar dispositions are all components that present themselves with different degrees of importance in the marriage calculations of different characters. For women, who were often barred from owning property and faced significant limitations in employment, marriage became particularly critical as both the expected social norm and the often necessary means of financial security. Harriet's bewilderment as Emma's decision to remain single and her own horror of the fate of spinsters illustrates the social stigma attached to those who were unable to marry, like the unfortunate and foolish Miss Bates.

Emma believes herself to be a skilled matchmaker, and her pride in her discernment of good matches and her ultimate humbling in this regard highlights that she has much to learn in judging others' characters, her own, and what makes a good marriage. While Austen in certain ways affirms the social conventions of marriage in pairing most of her characters with partners of equal social standing, she also complicates and

critiques these conventions. Though Emma believes Mr. Martin to be below Harriet, Mr. Knightley argues that Harriet would be lucky to be with Mr. Martin on account of the latter's virtue. Similarly, both Mr. Knightley and Emma come to agree that Frank is lucky to be accepted by Jane, even though she is considered of inferior social standing, because she surpasses him in virtue.

Marriage is also an agent of social change. Though certainly dictated by the characters' social standing (as when characters reject or pursue matches to consolidate their social standing), it also *makes* characters' social standing, as in the case with Mr. Weston's first marriage to a wealthy and well-connected woman, which elevated his social standing in society.



GENDER LIMITATIONS

Despite the strong-willed and confident female protagonist who is the novel's namesake, *Emma* reveals the limited options of women in Austen's era. Early in the novel, Emma decides to stay single: she views her situation as a financially self-sufficient single woman at the top of the social hierarchy to suit her preferences more than being a wife would. Yet Emma's influence in society is for the most part limited to her attempts to arrange her friends' marriage, and even this influence is revealed to be questionable. Mr. Knightley counters Emma's belief that she arranged Mr. Weston and Mrs. Weston's marriage with the assertion that they would have found each other on their own terms and time without Emma's "help." Furthermore, Emma's meddling more often than not proves mistaken and disastrous, as when she becomes responsible for Harriet's heartbreak at the hands of Mr. Elton. Emma's hobbies of charity, social calls, and the nice "female accomplishments" of music and art reflect a privileged but relatively limited sphere of activity.

Jane represents a case in which the limitations of her gender, combined with her relative lack of social status and financial stability, threaten her freedom to live the life she desires. This becomes particularly clear when she no longer views marriage to Frank as a viable option, and finds herself forced to accept an undesirable position as a governess. In the case of other female characters and even finally Emma, marriage represents the most viable option for a woman to live a comfortable life. Women's influence, in this sense, lies largely in their relation to men—to attract, reject, and accept their proposals of marriage.



MISPERCEPTION

Emma's initial perceptions of people and her own confidence in her abilities as matchmaker turn out to be very mistaken. Throughout the course of the novel, Emma repeatedly misreads signs of attention and attraction: she believes Mr. Elton to be wooing Harriet, when he is in fact interested only in her; she believes Harriet to be in

love with Frank, when she is in fact in love with Mr. Knightley, and so on. At the heart of Emma's misperception is her vanity and pride. She sees what she wants to believe, and it is not until the disastrous consequences of her interference that she gradually comes to realize how misplaced her confidence in her abilities is.



PRIDE AND VANITY

Emma is described in the first chapter as an extremely well endowed young woman, who possesses "some of the best blessings of existence": she is beautiful, intelligent, wealthy, and well bred with a father who loves her dearly. But she also possesses a critical flaw that threatens the success of her intentions to positively interfere with her friends' lives—her somewhat spoiled nature, and vanity and pride about her abilities and perceptiveness. Because she believes herself to have great talent in discerning people's natures and suitable love matches, she is slow to recognize that she is wrong. It takes many humiliating and hurtful mistakes before Emma is finally humbled into the realization that her interference is often misguided, and that she has much to learn both about the desires of others *and* her own heart.

As Mr. Knightley points out, Emma's initial dislike of Jane stems in part from her jealousy of the latter, who threatens her sense of security in her own accomplishment, beauty, and character. Though she believes that her distaste for Jane stems from their different styles of temperament (vivacity vs. reserve) and beauty (robust vs. slender), she comes to realize that it is in fact their similarity that results in her discomfort—they occupy similar positions as accomplished females in their social circles, and they are also both greatly admired. It is not until Emma progresses beyond her initial pride that she comes to appreciate Jane's quality and admire the very differences she once critiqued. Even more significantly, it is not until Emma is humbled by the revelation of her mistakes that she is able to know her own heart and recognize Mr. Knightley as her beloved.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in [blue text](#) throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



RIDDLES AND WORD GAMES

Riddle and word games represent the major theme of misperception, as their hidden meaning leaves much open for interpretation *and* misinterpretation. Just as Emma constantly reads romance between the lines of various social interactions, riddles and word games serve as disguised messages of romantic intentions. For those like Emma who

possess an incomplete knowledge of others' and their own hearts, however, these puzzles may contribute to, as opposed to clarifying, the confusion. For instance, Emma interprets Mr. Elton's riddle of "courtship" as intended for Harriet, when it is in fact intended for Emma herself, and Mr. Elton mistakenly interprets Emma's warm reception of it as encouragement.



LETTERS

Word games can also be intended to deceive, rather than clarify. As Mr. Knightley suspiciously observes the word games that Frank plays with Emma and Jane, he becomes convinced that it is but a cover for a much deeper game of deception and intrigue that the young man plays with the two ladies' hearts.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *Emma* published in 2003.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☹☹ The real evils, indeed, of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself: these were the disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyments. The danger, however, was at present so unperceived, that they did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Austen begins her novel with a brief description of Emma's situation and character. She's a smart, charming, and beautiful young woman, with a caring father and governess. And yet despite (or perhaps because of) her many good qualities and fortunate situation, she thinks very highly, rather too highly, of herself.

In this way, Austen lays out the protagonist's main obstacle: vanity. (The understatement in this passage — "a little too well of herself" — is one of Austen's lightly ironic stylistic devices.) The vanity is related, of course, to Emma's social position and wealth. Unlike Harriet, she lives in a world that shapes itself to her desires; she has led an easy life, encountering little to no resistance along the way. Throughout the novel, Austen is critical of Emma's oblivious,

self-indulgent attitude, and Mr. Knightley voices Austen's concerns and reprimands the young woman.

In this introductory section, readers learn that Emma's dangerous vanity is "at present so unperceived" that she does not consider it a "misfortune." Readers can assume that this is a hint, a gesture at Emma's imminent difficulties and her eventual character development. She is unaware and vain in the novel's first pages; in the final pages, she will be chastised and full of self-knowledge.

Chapter 3 Quotes

💡 [Emma] was not struck by any thing remarkably clever in Miss Smith's conversation, but she found her altogether very engaging—not inconveniently shy, not unwilling to talk—and yet so far from pushing, shewing so proper and becoming a deference, seeming so pleasantly grateful for being admitted to Hartfield, and so artlessly impressed by the appearance of every thing in so superior a style to what she had been used to, that she must have good sense and deserve encouragement. . . . *She* would notice her; she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintance, and introduce her into good society; she would form her opinions and her manners. It would be an interesting, and certainly a very kind undertaking; highly becoming her own situation in life, her leisure, and powers.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse, Harriet Smith

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

Emma, who has lived among the same people for twenty-one years, is thrilled to meet a new young woman, particularly one as charming and deferential as Harriet Smith. When Mrs. Goddard brings Miss Smith to Hartfield one evening, Emma immediately takes the young woman under her wing.



The narrator slips into Emma's mind, here, revealing her slightly condescending attitude and self-aggrandizing fantasies. Emma takes pleasure in Harriet's naiveté, her artlessness, and her obvious fascination with the protagonist. All of these qualities are a direct consequence of Harriet's inferior social position: in other words, Emma takes a liking to Harriet because the less fortunate young woman does not threaten her (unlike Jane Fairfax, who is Emma's match in beauty and accomplishment). In fact, Emma is fundamentally unimpressed by Harriet, who she does not consider "clever."

In the latter half of this quote, Emma (via the narrator) lists her plans for Harriet; Harriet is the object of every clause and Emma the subject. Emma has next to no interest in Harriet's future, but remains focused on her own abilities and reputation. She fixates on Harriet because she thinks the project might be "interesting" to her and "becoming"—allowing herself to prove how kind and broad-minded she is.

Chapter 4 Quotes

💡 A young farmer, whether on horseback or on foot, is the very last sort of person to raise my curiosity. The yeomanry are precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do. A degree or two lower, and a creditable appearance might interest me; I might hope to be useful to their families in some way or other. But a farmer can need none of my help, and is therefore in one sense as much above my notice as in every other he is below it.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse (speaker), Mr. Robert Martin

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Emma encourages Harriet to reveal her growing romantic interest in Robert Martin; then, in response to Harriet's description of the man, Emma explains that she has never seen him, since she pays no attention to people of his sort. Here Austen makes Emma's hypocrisy clear to the reader. Emma claims to have noble intentions, telling Harriet that she hopes "to be useful to" poor families, but her charity extends only to the obviously, desperately poor. (Readers might consider her visit to the sick in Chapter 10.) Farmers, busy with their land and their animals, do not interest Emma simply because they "need none of [her] help." She limits the definition of "help" to polite, condescending conversation and offerings. Emma is trapped by social conventions, despite her own vivacity and originality: she can only interact with her own social group or those vastly inferior to her.

Even her "interest" in the poor, however, is merely a redirected interest in herself. While Emma only intends to discourage Harriet's feelings for Robert Martin, she also shows off her youthful egocentrism; she visits and cares for the less fortunate because she takes pleasure in feeling magnanimous.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ I think [Harriet Smith] the very worst sort of companion that Emma could possibly have. She knows nothing herself, and looks upon Emma as knowing every thing. She is a flatterer in all her ways; and so much the worse, because undesigned. Her ignorance is hourly flattery. How can Emma imagine she has any thing to learn herself, while Harriet is presenting such a delightful inferiority? And as for Harriet, I will venture to say that *she* cannot gain by the acquaintance. Hartfield will only put her out of conceit with all the other places she belongs to. She will grow just refined enough to be uncomfortable with those among whom birth and circumstances have placed her home. I am much mistaken if Emma's doctrines give any strength of mind, or tend at all to make a girl adapt herself rationally to the varieties of her situation in life.—They only give a little polish.

Related Characters: Mr. George Knightley (speaker), Emma Woodhouse, Harriet Smith, Mrs. Weston

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston discuss Emma's burgeoning friendship with Harriet; Mr. Knightley believes that it can only do both women harm, since Harriet will play to Emma's vanity and Emma will only teach Harriet scorn for her peers.

Throughout the novel, Mr. Knightley displays a keen understanding of himself and other characters, and his warnings foreshadow the novel's main conflicts: Emma's repeated and failed attempts at matchmaking. Though Emma is clever, she is blind to many things, including her own vanity and Harriet's limited social mobility. Mr. Knightley makes the difficulties of life in an early nineteenth-century English village clear to the reader: all women are dependent on marriage or money, any crossover between social classes can lead to resentment.

And yet, Mr. Knightley's affection for Emma also shines through his thorny language. He thinks that Emma's talents and wits are such that she can and should apply herself to less frivolous pursuits. As evidenced by the rhetorical question, he believes that Emma has much to learn, that she's not condemned to gossip and idle chatter, but has the potential to become something far better. In this mix of criticism of and sympathy for the titular protagonist, Mr. Knightley is perhaps the closest stand-in for Austen herself.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ Harriet's claims to marry well are not so contemptible as you represent them. She is not a clever girl, but she has better sense than you are aware of, and does not deserve to have her understanding spoken of so slightly. Waving that point, however, and supposing her to be, as you describe her, only pretty and good-natured, let me tell you, that in the degree she possesses them, they are not trivial recommendations to the world in general . . . Her good-nature, too, is not so very slight a claim, comprehending, as it does, real, thorough sweetness of temper and manner, a very humble opinion of herself, and a great readiness to be pleased with other people. I am very much mistaken if your sex in general would not think such beauty, and such temper, the highest claims a woman could possess."

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse (speaker), Mr. George Knightley, Harriet Smith

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 61-62

Explanation and Analysis

Emma explains to Mr. Knightley that Harriet has already turned down Robert Martin's proposal (because of Emma's advice). Mr. Knightley is outraged, sure that Robert Martin is "superior in sense and situation" to Harriet. Emma leaps to her friend's (and her own) defense.

The reader and Mr. Knightley understand that Emma is in the wrong — Robert Martin is Harriet's only suitor, since Mr. Elton has set his sights on Emma. And yet despite her misunderstanding, Emma gives a rousing speech here, one that sheds light on underlying tensions between men and women at the time. She believes in agency and social mobility, in a woman's freedom to escape her past, and does not understand that the young woman's unfortunate background and poverty are two major obstacles. In a way, Emma is an optimist, attempting to unite two people — Harriet and Mr. Elton — from different classes.

Mr. Knightley, then, is the voice of reason, but also the voice of an unjust status quo: he must disabuse Emma of her hyperbolic belief that "beauty [and good] temper [are] the highest claims a woman could possess." He understands that Harriet, Mr. Elton, and Robert Martin are all in some degree trapped by their circumstances.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☞ I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry. Were I to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing! but I never have been in love; it is not my way, or my nature; and I do not think I ever shall. And, without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine. Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house as I am of Hartfield; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

On their way to the village, Harriet asks Emma why she has no plans to marry. In response, Emma reveals an astute understanding of her lucky situation.

Clever and vain, Emma sets herself apart from other women and their "usual inducements" (i.e. money) to marry. The repeated grammatical structure in this quote — "Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want..." — lends Emma a certain condescending authority. She feels a certain affection for Harriet, but above all she feels affection for herself: she wants to be "truly beloved and important" in a household and doubts that any many could love or respect her more than her father does.

In this section, Austen shows off both Emma's cunning practicality and her naiveté. She understands that a woman needs money and a household, but she doesn't understand love. She is only twenty years old, yet she makes the absurd declaration that love "is not [her] way, or [her] nature." Her certainty in speech hides her ignorance — particularly as *Emma* is a novel that ends in marriage.

☞ Never mind, Harriet, I shall not be a poor old maid; and it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable, old maid! the proper sport of boys and girls; but a single woman, of good fortune, is always respectable, and may be as sensible and pleasant as anybody else.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse (speaker), Harriet Smith

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of Chapter 10, Harriet worries that Emma will become an old maid; however, the wealthier young woman remains cheerful, sure that her fortune will protect her from society's contempt.

On the one hand, Emma's vision of her own future is heartening, reminding readers that some single women at the time could lead complete, fulfilling lives apart from marriage. Emma does not want a husband: this confession is a brave rejection of her world's conventions. While Harriet cries out in horror at the mere idea, Emma looks forward to her life as a spinster, someone "respectable" and "sensible" and "pleasant."

Yet Emma's bravery and confidence entirely hinge on her wealth: as Emma herself acknowledges: "a single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable old maid!" In this way, Austen directs the reader's attention to injustice between the classes as well as the sexes.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☞ The first error, and the worst, lay at her door. It was foolish, it was wrong, to take so active a part in bringing any 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. She was quite concerned and ashamed, and resolved to do such things no more.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse (speaker), Harriet Smith, Mr. Elton

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

Emma is appalled to discover Mr. Elton's interest in her: not only has she imagined his affection for Harriet, but he too has imagined a reciprocated affection on Emma's part. Finally she concludes that she's been wrong to meddle in matters of the heart, and regrets treating the feelings of others as if they were just a game.

Free indirect discourse, here, gives the readers a glimpse of Emma's distress. The accumulation of simple (and similar) clauses — "It was foolish, it was wrong" — and self-

castigating verbs (including "assuming" and "making light") indicate that the revelation is a serious blow to Emma's pride and self-perception.

But though Emma resolves "to do such things no more," the reader might see an ironic edge to this statement: Emma can't hold herself to her promise for more than a paragraph. Indeed, just a few sentences later she falls back into daydreams, wondering if a "pert young lawyer" might be a possible suitor for Harriet. Her remorse is a short-lived phenomenon, and her imagination persists from chapter to chapter, conflict to conflict.

Chapter 18 Quotes

☛ Depend upon it, Emma, a sensible man would find no difficulty in it. He would feel himself in the right; and the declaration—made, of course, as a man of sense would make it, in a proper manner—would do him more good, raise him higher, fix his interest stronger with the people he depended on, than all that a line of shifts and expedients can ever do. Respect would be added to affection. . . . Respect for right conduct is felt by every body. If he would act in this sort of manner, on principle, consistently, regularly, their little minds would bend to his.

Related Characters: Mr. George Knightley (speaker), Emma Woodhouse, Frank Churchill

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 139

Explanation and Analysis

Emma and Mr. Knightley discuss Frank Churchill's failure to visit. While the young woman is sympathetic to Frank's situation, Mr. Knightley disapproves of his behavior, finding it immature and weak.

While Frank does make poor decisions throughout the novel—misleading characters and disguising his own feelings—Mr. Knightley expresses a scorn for the young man that might seem excessive to the reader. In this way, Austen reveals that Mr. Knightley, like Emma, thinks too highly of his own judgement and his own character. In this section, he shows no empathy for Frank and no uncertainty: he speaks only in declarative sentences, telling Emma to "depend upon it." Though the two characters butt heads again and again, they share a stubborn faith in their own judgement. (It might also be the case the Mr. Knightley is excessively critical of Frank because he is subconsciously jealous of him and his appeal to Emma.)

Here, Emma shows a particular concern for Frank, acknowledging that he must reconcile his own desires with the desires of his overbearing guardians. As a woman, Emma is acutely aware of each person's conflicting obligations; Austen makes it clear that Mr. Knightley often lacks such nuanced insight.

Chapter 20 Quotes

☛ Emma was sorry;—to have to pay civilities to a person she did not like through three long months!—to be always doing more than she wished, and less than she ought! Why she did not like Jane Fairfax might be a difficult question to answer; Mr. Knightley had once told her it was because she saw in her the really accomplished young woman, which she wanted to be thought herself; and though the accusation had been eagerly refuted at the time, there were moments of self-examination in which her conscience could not quite acquit her.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse, Mr. George Knightley, Jane Fairfax

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 156

Explanation and Analysis



In Chapter 20, we learn of Jane's difficult childhood and her plans to become a governess. Though Emma does not look forward to their time together, she still pays Jane a visit (partially for Mr. Knightley's sake).

Again, Austen points to the awkward gaps separating one social class from another. While Jane is happy to visit Highbury's most poor, she has trouble engaging with Robert Martin, Miss Bates, or Jane Fairfax, people who are poorer than she but less obviously in need. This relates, of course, to Emma's vanity, which is only flattered during her visits to the very poor and sick, but suffers in the presence of those closer to her, like Jane. Readers can see in Emma, here, a comic reticence to accept her own flaws: while the narrator first tells us that "why she did not like Jane Fairfax might be a difficult question to answer," this statement is immediately (and humorously) undercut when the answer appears in the latter part of the same sentence. Jealous of Jane but slow to come to terms with this envy, Emma will consider the question gingerly, using only impersonal grammatical structures (e.g. "the accusation had been eagerly refuted" and "there were moments of self-examination").

Chapter 25 Quotes

☞☞ The Coles were very respectable in their way, but they ought to be taught that it was not for them to arrange the terms on which the superior families would visit them. This lesson, she very much feared, they would receive only from herself; she had little hope of Mr. Knightley, none of Mr. Weston.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse, Mr. George Knightley, Mr. Weston, Mr. and Mrs. Cole

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

Emma contemplates the Coles' new prominent social position and concludes that she will not accept their invitation. She believes that the invitation itself is impudent, a minor insult to her own superior rank.

The narrator again slips from the omniscient third person into free indirect discourse here, opening the curtains on Emma's snobbery and vanity. This passage drips with condescension — from the verb "to teach" to the expression "superior families" — and reminds readers that Emma, though charming and intelligent, has a blind faith in an arbitrary hierarchy that favors her own family at the expense of others.

Emma plans to "teach" the Coles this lesson by turning down their invitation; she even tries to make this rejection as stinging and insulting as possible. Not only does she believe in the Coles' inferiority, but her vanity compels her to assert herself and prove her own social dominance. Again, despite her resolutions and promises, Emma meddles in everyone's affairs, full of confidence in her own authority and ability as a wealthy and intelligent young woman.

Chapter 30 Quotes

☞☞ It had been a very happy fortnight, and forlorn must be the sinking from it into the common course of Hartfield days. To complete every other recommendation, he had *almost* told her that he loved her. What strength, or what constancy of affection he might be subject to, was another point; but at present she could not doubt his having a decidedly warm admiration, a conscious preference of herself; and this persuasion, joined to all the rest, made her think that she *must* be a little in love with him, in spite of every previous determination against it.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse, Frank Churchill

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 243-244

Explanation and Analysis

Frank's sudden departure from Hartfield at his guardians request leaves Emma lonely and contemplative. She thinks about their last conversation, full of hesitation.

Emma's naiveté and vanity are on full display in this passage: she has no doubt that Frank loves her, and that he almost confessed to that love during their talk. (The narrator's declarative sentences reflect Emma's confidence.) Of course, Emma knows very little about Frank Churchill and his situation — she jumps to the conclusions that suit her needs and desires.

All of Emma's misunderstandings and assumptions lead her to believe that she reciprocates Frank's feelings, and this is a rather comic realization. She betrays her own limited experience of romance when she calls herself "a little in love with him," and the narrator reminds readers of her foolish "determination against it." She believes that her own willpower will protect her from love, but Frank's attentions are so flattering to her vanity that she confuses her satisfaction with real love.

Chapter 32 Quotes

☞☞ "Insufferable woman!" was her immediate exclamation. "Worse than I had supposed. Absolutely insufferable! Knightley!—I could not have believed it. Knightley!—never seen him in her life before, and call him Knightley!—and discover that he is a gentleman! A little upstart, vulgar being, with her Mr. E., and her *caro sposo*, and her resources, and all her airs of pert pretension and under-bred finery. Actually to discover that Mr. Knightley is a gentleman! I doubt whether he will return the compliment, and discover her to be a lady. I could not have believed it! And to propose that she and I should unite to form a musical club! One would fancy we were bosom friends! And Mrs. Weston!—Astonished that the person who had brought me up should be a gentlewoman! Worse and worse. I never met with her equal. Much beyond my hopes. Harriet is disgraced by any comparison."

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse (speaker), Mr. George Knightley, Harriet Smith, Mrs. Weston, Mrs. Elton

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 259

Explanation and Analysis

The Eltons' visit to Hartfield is a disaster. Mrs. Elton talks of herself incessantly, asks impertinent questions and finally deigns to call Mr. Knightley just "Knightley." They depart, leaving Emma to stew in her own anger and disgust.

While the reader will hardly find Mrs. Elton sympathetic — her conversation is uninspired — Emma's violent reaction does not quite match the situation. Exclamations and outraged fragments and insults abound in this passage, all revealing Emma's wounded upper-class pride. She despises Mrs. Elton for her familiarity, a lack of deference implying that the two women have a similar rank.




The reader might also note that Emma is offended on Mr. Knightley's behalf. Much of her anger stems from Mrs. Elton's nickname for him: Knightley. (Emma exclaims "Knightley!" several times in a row.) Already a strong attachment to her family friend is clear to the reader, though Emma herself will not perceive it for many chapters, and will maintain that she feels affection only for Frank Churchill.


growing affection for him. She wants to "catch his eye" and longs "to be thanking him" — but she cannot yet identify the romantic affection lurking below her reaction to his gallantry. In fact, we might imagine that her "countenance" communicates not only her gratitude (as she believes) but her potential love for him as well.

Chapter 41 Quotes

☞ The word was *blunder*; and as Harriet exultingly proclaimed it, there was a blush on Jane's cheek which gave it a meaning not otherwise ostensible. Mr. Knightley connected it with the dream; but how it could all be, was beyond his comprehension. How the delicacy, the discretion of his favourite could have been so lain asleep! He feared there must be some decided involvement. Disingenuousness and double dealing seemed to meet him at every turn. These letters were but the vehicle for gallantry and trick. It was a child's play, chosen to conceal a deeper game on Frank Churchill's part.

Related Characters: Mr. George Knightley, Frank Churchill, Jane Fairfax, Harriet Smith

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 326

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 41, the narrator gives us Mr. Knightley's account of events, including a strange interaction between Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill. The young friends are fiddling with letter blocks when Frank pushes a scrambled encoded word toward Jane: "blunder." Mr. Knightley understands that the word relates to the evening's earlier confusion: how did Frank learn about Mr. Perry's carriage?

As Mr. Knightley watches this all unfold, he begins to suspect a secret understanding between Jane and Frank. The free indirect discourse here shows readers just how much Mr. Knightley disapproves of Frank's choices; he sees in Frank's game "disingenuousness," "double dealing," and a show of "gallantry," all damning words. While Emma might understand the necessity and value of Frank's deceit (since she herself makes similar mistakes), Mr. Knightley feels only scorn for Frank.

In a way, Mr. Knightley's unshakable belief in clarity and honesty limits his understanding, just as Emma's passion for meddling blind her to the truth of certain situations. The two characters, with their conflicting flaws, have different

Chapter 38 Quotes

☞ In another moment a happier sight caught her;—Mr. Knightley leading Harriet to the set!—Never had she been more surprised, seldom more delighted, than at that instant. She was all pleasure and gratitude, both for Harriet and herself, and longed to be thanking him; and though too distant for speech, her countenance said much, as soon as she could catch his eye again.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse, Mr. George Knightley, Harriet Smith

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 307

Explanation and Analysis

Emma is shocked to witness Mr. Elton's behavior: he refuses to dance with Harriet and exchanges "smiles of high glee" with his wife instead. Emma then watches Mr. Knightley ask Harriet to dance, rescuing her from humiliation.

While Mr. Knightley is of a higher social standing than Mr. Elton, he has none of the latter's petty anxieties. In other words, Mr. Elton wants to prove himself superior to Harriet but his insult backfires, revealing only his deplorable manners. His incivility makes Mr. Knightley seem all the more gracious and, in this scene, readers can spot Emma's

readings of their mutual friends and the novel's various conflicts.

Chapter 43 Quotes

☛☛ Were she a woman of fortune, I would leave every harmless absurdity to take its chance, I would not quarrel with you for any liberties of manner. Were she your equal in situation—but, Emma, consider how far this is from being the case. She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to old age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done, indeed!—You, whom she had known from an infant, whom she had seen grow up from a period when her notice was an honour, to have you now, in thoughtless spirits, and the pride of the moment, laugh at her, humble her—and before her niece, too—and before others, many of whom (certainly *some*,) would be entirely guided by *your* treatment of her.

Related Characters: Mr. George Knightley (speaker), Emma Woodhouse, Miss Bates

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 351-352

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Knightley is stern in his disapproval of Emma here. Emma offers the justification that "what is good and what is ridiculous are most unfortunately blended" in Miss Bates, but to no avail.

Here Austen delves into the complexities of social class in Highbury. On the one hand, Mr. Knightley's concern is condescension — he believes that he and Emma, two of the town's most refined and wealthy residents, must treat the less fortunate with charity. (Assuming that their "inferiors" will then emulate their behavior.) Yet on the other hand, he displays a surprising amount of compassion, and has a thorough understanding of Miss Bates' awkward position. In Mr. Knightley's estimation, Emma was lazy to mock her, to shoot at an easy target who cannot defend herself.

Readers might conclude from this passage that Emma and Mr. Knightley are compatible, despite their flaws. Mr. Knightley is forthright with Emma, ready to point out her "pride" and "thoughtless spirits." And yet he does so with her interest at heart. Emma, to her credit, does not laugh off the lecture, trusting her friend to watch out for her flaws and offer sound advice.

Chapter 44 Quotes

☛☛ The wretchedness of a scheme to Box Hill was in Emma's thoughts all the evening. . . . If attention, in future, could do away the past, she might hope to be forgiven. She had been often remiss, her conscience told her so; remiss, perhaps, more in thought than fact; scornful, ungracious. But it should be so no more. In the warmth of true contrition, she would call upon her the very next morning, and it should be the beginning, on her side, of a regular, equal, kindly intercourse.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse, Jane Fairfax

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 353

Explanation and Analysis

Chapter 45 opens with Emma's lingering remorse, as she remembers Mr. Knightley's rebuke and vows to be more gracious in her future dealings with Miss Bates.

This scene belongs to a larger underlying pattern in the novel: Emma misbehaves in some way (offending or misleading someone), incurring Mr. Knightley's disapproval. She understands her mistakes and promises to mend her ways. Readers might consider, for instance, the similar moment in Chapter 16, when Emma discovers Mr. Elton's interest in her. The narrator explains that "she was quite concerned and ashamed, and resolved to do such things [e.g. matchmaking] no more."

First and foremost, Mr. Knightley shows Emma the complexities of class and wealth in Highbury, as well as her own responsibility towards the less fortunate. In the novel's first section, she fails to understand the implications of Harriet's poverty and then, during the trip to Box Hill, the implications of Miss Bates' misfortune. She calls herself "remiss" twice in the passage, as well as "scornful" and "ungracious" — her respect for Mr. Knightley is such that their conversation leaves an impression on her, one that lasts from one chapter to the next.

Chapter 45 Quotes

☞ [Emma] could have no doubt—putting every thing together—that Jane was resolved to receive no kindness from *her*. She was sorry, very sorry. Her heart was grieved for a state which seemed but the more pitiable from this sort of irritation of spirits, inconsistency of action, and inequality of powers; and it mortified her that she was given so little credit for proper feeling, or esteemed so little worthy as a friend: but she had the consolation of knowing that her intentions were good, and of being able to say to herself, that could Mr. Knightley have been privy to all her attempts of assisting Jane Fairfax, could he even have seen into her heart, he would not, on this occasion, have found any thing to reprove.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse, Jane Fairfax

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 367

Explanation and Analysis

Jane makes it clear that she does not wish to pursue a friendship with Emma. Though Jane's motives remain unclear, Emma is both embarrassed and hurt by this state of affairs; she wishes to explain herself to Jane.

Emma's remorse is certainly touching, but at the same time she is (as usual) operating under faulty assumptions. In this case, she believes in Frank's affection for her and his indifference towards Jane: she has no idea that Jane and Frank are in love, and that Jane views Emma as one of many threats to their secret engagement.

Emma's mortification here seems related to her recent conversation with Mr. Knightley, and her realization that she has mistreated Miss Bates. She shows a particular concern for Mr. Knightley's regard in both cases: the mere contemplation of his imaginary approval brings her peace. (Note that she uses the conditional mood.) Her vanity is wounded — she would like recognition and praise — yet her own good intentions are a "consolation." In other words, Emma has become more mature as she has cleaved more closely to Mr. Knightley's ideals.

Chapter 46 Quotes

☞ I have escaped; and that I should escape, may be a matter of grateful wonder to you and myself. But this does not acquit *him*, Mrs. Weston; and I must say, that I think him greatly to blame. What right had he to come among us with affection and faith engaged, and with manners so very disengaged? What right had he to endeavour to please, as he certainly did—to distinguish any one young woman with persevering attention, as he certainly did—while he really belonged to another?—How could he tell what mischief he might be doing?—How could he tell that he might not be making me in love with him?—very wrong, very wrong indeed.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse (speaker), Frank Churchill, Jane Fairfax

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 372

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Weston delivers the news of Frank Churchill's engagement to Jane Fairfax with trepidation, worried that the young woman may have developed affection for him. However, Emma explains that this is not the case; she is only disappointed in his deceitful behavior. She is so upset, in fact, that Mrs. Weston jumps to his defense.

This is a curious reversal of a scene that readers have already encountered: Emma defending Frank Churchill while Mr. Knightley disparages him. In Chapter 18, for instance, Mr. Knightley tells Emma that he has no patience for the unreliable and flighty young man, who lacks the courage to visit his own father. In Chapter 18, Mr. Knightley is obviously too harsh a judge, and in this later instance, Emma takes on the same role. (She lets herself get carried away with indignant rhetorical questions and emphatic repetitions.)

Frank is no villain, of course, and this scene only reminds readers that Emma is struggling to forgive irresponsible behavior in others and herself. Though she has come to see Frank as Mr. Knightley sees him, she does so at the expense of empathy and charity. In fact, in the next chapter, she admits that her anger stems from her own embarrassment, since she has once again encouraged misplaced affection in Harriet.

Chapter 47 Quotes

☹☹ A few minutes were sufficient for making her acquainted with her own heart. A mind like hers, once opening to suspicion, made rapid progress; she touched, she admitted, she acknowledged the whole truth. Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley than with Frank Churchill? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet's having some hope of a return? It darted through her with the speed of an arrow that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse, Mr. George Knightley, Frank Churchill, Harriet Smith

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 382

Explanation and Analysis

Much to Emma's surprise, Harriet confesses that she loves Mr. Knightley, not Frank Churchill. In addition, Harriet believes that he may reciprocate these feelings; Emma falls silent, wondering at her own reaction to the news.

In this passage, the narrator moves from an omniscient description of Emma's thoughts to the turbulent thoughts themselves. The rhetorical questions, then, are seemingly the exact questions that Emma asks herself in this moment, and the exclamation at the end is Emma's own realization (simply reported in the third person). She finally understands that "Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself," the forceful verb indicating the inevitability of her affection as well as her own assumed superiority over Harriet. Indeed, the reader knows that Emma *must* be Mr. Knightley's wife: no other woman matches him in intelligence, wit, and social standing.

While Emma is shocked to learn of her own feelings — the final arrow metaphor might remind readers of Cupid — the engagement makes perfect sense. Characters can never quite move beyond their rank in the novel, and marriage is a matter of money and birth as well as love.

☹☹ With insufferable vanity had she believed herself in the secret of everybody's feelings; with unpardonable arrogance proposed to arrange everybody's destiny. She was proved to have been universally mistaken; and she had not quite done nothing—for she had done mischief. She had brought evil on Harriet, on herself, and she too much feared, on Mr. Knightley.—Were this most unequal of all connexions to take place, on her must rest all the reproach of having given it a beginning; for his attachment, she must believe to be produced only by a consciousness of Harriet's;—and even were this not the case, he would never have known Harriet at all but for her folly.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse, Mr. George Knightley, Harriet Smith

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 386-387

Explanation and Analysis

This is Emma's final, great moment of regret. Though she has made many mistakes in earlier chapters, she has never before borne the full brunt of her meddling ways. She has watched her friends nurse their broken hearts and kept her own intact, safe from the daily commotion of Highbury. Now, for the first time, she is to blame for her own pain as well.


Emma understands the full extent of her wrongdoing: she describes her own "insufferable vanity" and "unpardonable arrogance," calling herself "universally mistaken." The mistake itself is an "evil," a hyperbole that captures Emma's intense distress. In comparison, her earlier moments of regret seem almost insincere, humorous but idle resolutions to meddle less in her friends' affairs.

And yet, through her anger, Emma knows that a relationship between Mr. Knightley and Harriet would be a "most unequal of all connexions." She once encouraged Harriet to pursue her social superior, Mr. Elton, but now understands that any similar match would be disastrous (and that Mr. Knightley, again, "must marry no one but herself," his only equal in wealth and wit).

Chapter 49 Quotes

☞ "I cannot make speeches, Emma:"—he soon resumed; and in a tone of such sincere, decided, intelligible tenderness as was tolerably convincing.—"If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more. But you know what I am.—You hear nothing but truth from me.—I have blamed you, and lectured you, and you have borne it as no other woman in England would have borne it.—Bear with the truths I would tell you now, dearest Emma, as well as you have borne with them. The manner, perhaps, may have as little to recommend them. God knows, I have been a very indifferent lover.—But you understand me.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse, Mr. George Knightley

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 403

Explanation and Analysis

As they walk around the grounds, Emma expects her friend to reveal his love for Harriet, and braces herself for disappointment. Instead Mr. Knightley confesses to loving Emma herself.

In this passage, Austen makes Mr. Knightley into a suddenly vulnerable character, despite chapters and chapters of stern reprimands and lectures. (The many m-dashes here indicate that he's uncharacteristically tongue-tied and nervous.) He so often goes to great lengths to educate Emma and point out her flaws, but now he admits to his own inadequacies.

He has been "a very indifferent lover," reluctant or afraid to make his affections known. And he believes that his manner with Emma has been too stern, that he has not deserved her graceful tolerance. He says that Emma has "borne [his lectures] as no other woman in England would have," and indeed, not once has Emma resented or disputed her friend's scoldings. For the first time, the reader is encouraged to blame Mr. Knightley rather than Emma.

☞ Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken; but where, as in this case, though the conduct is mistaken, the feelings are not, it may not be very material.—Mr. Knightley could not impute to Emma a more relenting heart than she possessed, or a heart more disposed to accept of his.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse, Mr. George Knightley

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 404

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator pauses for a moment, encouraging readers to contemplate and enjoy this final, happy turn of events. Their confession, then, seems to be the only moment of "complete truth" in the novel.

In this way, the narrator reminds us just how often one character (and not only Emma) has misread or misunderstood another character in previous chapters. Characters who lie to each other, divulge only partial truths, or misrepresent their feelings populate the novel's pages, and so Emma's mistakes and misunderstandings do not really set her apart from anyone else. Instead, they are the inevitable (and pardonable) consequence of all the white lies and obfuscation of society in general.

This is the novel's climax, the moment when "complete truth" prevails, and yet Austen provides very little direct dialogue. The narrator only recounts Mr. Knightley's opening remarks; with regards to Emma's confession, readers only learn the following: "What did she say?—Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does." We might consider the implications of this significant gap in narration, this blank at the heart of the chapter. Is this a comment on the inadequacy of verbal communication? Is the non-verbal closer to complete truth?

Chapter 54 Quotes

☞ The joy, the gratitude, the exquisite delight of her sensations may be imagined. The sole grievance and alloy thus removed in the prospect of Harriet's welfare, she was really in danger of becoming too happy for security.—What had she to wish for? Nothing, but to grow more worthy of him, whose intentions and judgment had been ever so superior to her own. Nothing, but that the lessons of her past folly might teach her humility and circumspection in future.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse, Mr. George Knightley

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 444-445

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Knightley relays to Emma the news of Harriet's engagement to Robert Martin. Emma is shocked, convinced that her fiancé is mistaken; only after much reassurance does she allow herself to appreciate both Harriet's luck and her own. She is happy to discover that she has not ruined Harriet's prospects in fulfilling her own desires.

Emma has completely repented and seen the error of her ways: knowing that the damage to Harriet's future may be irreparable, she feels guilt and grief. The discovery that Harriet has accepted Robert Martin's proposal, then, brings with it "joy," "gratitude," and "exquisite delight." Readers also learn that Harriet has matured, as she has learned to trust her own heart rather than Emma's advice.

Emma's joy — proof of her newfound wisdom — then morphs into an adoring contemplation of her fiancé : she tells herself that her only wish is "to grow more worthy of" him. The emphatic repetition of the expression "nothing, but..." shows Emma's profound love, but also a sense of ingrained inferiority. Emma is no longer a juvenile but fiercely independent young woman; she has, in a sense, accepted the necessity of marriage and her own subservience to a supposedly superior husband.

●● High in the rank of her most serious and heartfelt felicities, was the reflection that all necessity of concealment from Mr. Knightley would soon be over. The disguise, equivocation, mystery, so hateful to her to practise, might soon be over. She could now look forward to giving him that full and perfect confidence which her disposition was most ready to welcome as a duty.

Related Characters: Emma Woodhouse, Mr. George Knightley

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 445

Explanation and Analysis

Following Mr. Knightley's announcement, Emma sees that Harriet is no longer in love with him, and that she herself no longer has hidden the young woman's affections from her own betrothed. For the first time, she can tread a path of complete honesty: this is her chief joy.

Readers might interpret this passage as a commentary on successful and unsuccessful marriages. Emma creates a stark division between "disguise, equivocation, mystery" and "full and perfect confidence" — the first is hateful and unpleasant to her, and the second brings her happiness and satisfaction. Emma believes that her impending marriage to Mr. Knightley will require total honesty and integrity.

While this is not an obviously controversial stance, it does raise several questions. How can the reader understand this "full and perfect confidence" if only "very seldom does complete truth belong to any human disclosure"? Complete honesty seems impossible in the novel's world, with its petty disagreements, half-truths, and insults. A more general question might be: is Emma an optimistic novel or a pessimistic one?



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

The novel introduces us to the protagonist, Emma Woodhouse, a privileged young woman who lives near the village of Highbury and is blessed with good looks, cleverness, and wealth. She has not experienced any great hardships in life, and her only significant disadvantages in life are that she has been rather spoiled by those around her and thinks a little too highly of herself.

The importance of social class and gender is introduced immediately in the character of Emma, who is able to remain comfortably single as a woman because of her high social class and privileged situation. With these blessings, she avoids the stigma of spinsterhood and is instead regarded as a leading lady of high society.



Because Emma's older sister, Isabella, is married and her mother died when she was still young, she is the mistress of her father's house. Miss Taylor, her governess of sixteen years, presents less of an authority figure and behaves more like a sister and friend.

Because she lacks maternal correction, Emma is used to getting her way from an early age. She has encountered few people who either observe fault in her or are willing to correct her, inflating her vanity.



Today, Emma sadly contemplates the departure of Miss Taylor from the Woodhouse family estate at Hartfield. Miss Taylor has married Mr. Weston, a widower of good fortune and pleasant manners, depriving Emma of her constant companion. Her elderly father, Mr. Woodhouse, is even more distressed by Miss Taylor's departure, as he hates change of every kind and cannot see her happiness beyond the unpleasantness of his discomfort.

Miss Taylor's marriage preoccupies Emma's mind, highlighting the centrality of marriage and gender in Austen's novel. Because Miss Taylor has few financial resources, marriage provides an opportunity for her to escape her lower working class status as well as to achieve material security.



Mr. Knightley, a longtime, close family friend and Emma's brother-in-law (he is the older brother of Isabella's husband), visits in the evening. He chats pleasantly with the Woodhouses about Miss Taylor's marriage. He celebrates the match, noting that Miss Taylor will now have her own home and be comfortably taken care of.

Mr. Knightley affirms the goodness of Miss Taylor's match, contributing a practical and wise perspective to the privileged Woodhouses' slightly self-absorbed distress over her departure.



When Emma takes credit for making the match, Mr. Knightley gently scolds her role in the affair and insists that she bears no responsibility for their marriage. He is one of the few people who can find any fault with Emma, and the only person who ever attempts to correct her.

Throughout the novel, Mr. Knightley provides an alternative perspective to Emma's interpretation of events, one that often corrects her misperceptions; he plays an almost paternal role that is otherwise lacking in her life.



Mr. Woodhouse, who hates change so much he even dislikes marriage, begs Emma to put off with making such successful matches. Emma declares she will make one final match: she has determined to find Mr. Elton, their neighborhood rector, a wife.

Mr. Woodhouse blindly adopts Emma's self-perception of her talents and believes in her perfection. Emma cannot resist exerting her self-acclaimed influence in her social circles.



CHAPTER 2

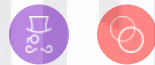
Mr. Weston's first marriage with Miss Churchill was an "unsuitable connection" that "did not produce much happiness." Because Mr. Weston was from a lower class than his wife, his wife's family disapproved of the match. Mrs. Weston, although she loved Mr. Weston, also missed the luxuries of her former lifestyle.

The importance of social class in making a good marriage "match" is highlighted in Mr. Weston's first marriage, which despite being a love match is unhappy because of the social and familial pressures resulting from the mismatch in social class.



Three years after their marriage, Mrs. Weston died and left Mr. Weston with a boy child and even less money than he started out with because of their high spending. The childless Mr. and Mrs. Churchill, the late Mrs. Weston's brother and his wife, adopted the child as their own heir in a reconciliation of sorts between the two families.

Mr. Weston's first marriage leaves him slightly older and wiser, as well as significantly poorer and unhappier. If the Churchills had not had a turn of heart and adopted his son, he would have been in a much more difficult situation.



Mr. Weston then worked for about twenty years to secure his fortune, leaving the militia for the trade industry. When Miss Taylor caught his eye, he responsibly purchased the small estate of Randalls before proposing marriage. His second marriage with this "well-judging and truly amiable woman" is comfortable and delightful, a much happier and more suitable match than his first.

Mr. Weston learns the importance of securing financial security, a more even match in social class, and solid character qualities with his second marriage. When he is interested in Miss Taylor, he ensures that he has also followed the pragmatic and socially prescribed prerequisites to marriage, like buying suitable property.



The village looks forward to the visit of Frank Churchill, the son of Mr. Weston's first marriage, who is expected to visit on the occasion of his father's second marriage. Mr. Weston brings back glowing reports of his son on his annual visits to London, where the Churchills live, and the village has come to feel a degree of pride in him as well—even though he has never returned his father's visits and come to see him in Highbury. There is much gossip about the congratulatory letter that Frank has written to Mrs. Weston, in which he promises to finally visit.

The reputation of Frank precedes his physical introduction to Highbury. Though only Mr. Weston has met him, the village's adoring adoption of this high society Churchill highlights the influence of social class in the community; it not only predisposes the community to like him, but also to forget and forgive his lack of any physical visits despite his letters.



CHAPTER 3

Mr. Woodhouse enjoys small evening parties that Emma arranges with their neighborhood friends, preferring them to large gatherings because of his nervous disposition. Among their inner circle are the Westons, Mr. Knightley, and Mr. Elton. Their second set includes the widow Mrs. Bates and her plain daughter, Miss Bates. Miss Bates is single, middle-class, and middle-aged, yet her pleasant and chatty nature make her well-liked despite these disadvantages. Miss Goddard, a schoolmistress, is also included in this second set.

Social class is central to the relationships in the novel. Those at the top of the hierarchy dictate the invitations. The Woodhouses' inner circle consists of people who share either comparable levels of wealth and familial prestige, or who have long-standing ties of affection. Their second circle consists of a more miscellaneous and subservient group of women who are always ready to accept their invitations.



Emma invites these friends to dine with them one evening. Miss Goddard brings Harriet Smith, one of her boarders with unknown parentage. Emma takes an immediate liking to Harriet because of the girl's sweet-looking beauty, her pleasant demeanor, and her admiration for Emma herself. Emma decides to adopt Harriet as her little friend in a spirit of good will and vanity, resolving to introduce Harriet to high society and to improve her opinions and manners.

Just as the high class Emma controls who is invited to their estate, she also has the prerogative to initiate friendships with those of lower class. Emma's decision to take Harriet under her wing is influenced by both charity and vanity—she wants to help Harriet, and she likes to see herself as someone willing to help a lower class woman—which are two traits connected to the privilege of her high class and to Emma's own personal character.



CHAPTER 4

Emma and Harriet develop their friendship, as Harriet comes to replace Mrs. Weston as Emma's constant companion. Harriet is not clever, but her docile and grateful disposition appeals to Emma's vanity and suits her desire to improve Harriet.

Emma's friendship with Harriet is rooted not only in a mutual enjoyment of each other's company but also inequality: Emma is Harriet's superior in social class, education, and wealth.



Emma learns with amusement and then alarm that Harriet has been spending much of her time with the Martins, a family of farmers. Emma worries that Mr. Martin and Harriet may develop feelings for each other and marry, placing her friend in what Emma considers to be an unfavorable alliance. She subtly directs Harriet's attention to Mr. Martin's inferior education and social standing, suggesting that Mr. Martin is of a class that Emma herself has nothing to do with: he is well-off enough to be above her charity, even as he is below her social attention as a farmer.

Despite possessing a charitable nature, Emma reveals her snobbishness in her disdain for the Martins. She ostensibly wants what is best for her friend, Harriet, but in doing so she imposes her own taste—what would make Emma happy—upon Harriet. Emma subtly prods and influences Harriet to adopt her attitude for the lower classes and consider Mr. Martin below her.



When Emma and Harriet encounter Mr. Martin on a walk, Emma assesses him as plain and ungentlemanly. She encourages Harriet to compare him with the other gentlemen that Emma has introduced to Harriet. In particular, she hastens to bring Mr. Elton to Harriet's attention. Emma has already begun to devise a match in her mind between the two of them. She believes Mr. Elton to be an excellent match for Harriet as a respectable and well-educated gentleman.

Emma's central critique of Mr. Martin's "lack of gentility" is based on his social class and "coarser" manners, as opposed to any real character defects. Yet for Emma, class and character are almost inextricable in her mind: Mr. Martin's entire person is inferior to Mr. Elton because he is from a lower class.



CHAPTER 5

Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston discuss the friendship developing between Emma and Harriet. Mr. Knightley believes that Harriet's admiration and ignorance will increase Emma's vanity and self-assuredness, while Emma's refinement will render Harriet just polished enough to feel uncomfortable with her own circumstances and society.

Mr. Knightley continues to reveal his ability to both care for and critique Emma. He provides a counterpoint to Emma's own perspective, and the narrative and other characters affirm his good judgment and reliability.



Mrs. Weston disagrees. She believes that Harriet will provide the companionship that Emma currently lacks, and that Emma will indeed educate Harriet in books and taste.

The good-natured Mrs. Weston can find no fault in Emma's friendships, and, like Emma's father, she adopts Emma's own perspective.



In the course of their conversation, Mr. Knightley also observes that Emma has been spoiled by being the cleverest in her family, as well as the mistress of the house from an early age. Mrs. Weston, in her turn, remarks on her beauty, which Mr. Knightley agrees he can find no fault with.

Mr. Knightley confirms the effect of Emma's upbringing and her adoring governess in spoiling Emma. The only dimension of Emma that Mr. Knightley finds flawless is her physical beauty.



Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley amiably agree to disagree on the subject of Emma and Harriet, and Mr. Knightley agrees to refrain from spreading his objections to Harriet and Emma's friendship.

Though Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston both desire the best for Emma, they possess different views of what she needs to develop as a person.



The two muse on what will become of Emma. Mr. Knightley believes that it will do Emma good to be in love, and "in some doubt of a return." Both, however, believe that it is unlikely Emma will become attached to anyone as she rarely leaves her home, and her marriage would present great difficulties to her father.

Just as Emma feels no lack in her life of influential and privileged singleness, neither Mr. Knightley nor Mrs. Weston foresee the independent and self-assured Emma falling in love with anyone in the neighborhood.



CHAPTER 6

Emma continues to speak highly of Mr. Elton to Harriet, even as she compliments Harriet's natural graces in conversation with Mr. Elton. Mr. Elton warmly praises the qualities that Harriet has cultivated through her friendship with Emma, and when Emma expresses a desire to paint Harriet's portrait, Mr. Elton quickly supports the idea.

The dialogue between Emma and Mr. Elton is loaded with compliments that Emma interprets to be directed towards Harriet, but the reader can alternatively interpret them to be aimed towards Emma herself.



Emma undertakes Harriet's portrait, and Mr. Elton avidly marks its process—as would be fitting, Emma notes, for Harriet's admirer. When Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley suggest that Emma has made Harriet more beautiful in her portrait, Mr. Elton heatedly defends the portrait's likeness.

Emma continues to smugly interpret Mr. Elton's flattery as evidence that he is falling in love with Harriet. She sees what she wants to, oblivious to any interpretations that contradict her desires.



Mr. Elton gallantly offers to take the portrait, which he declares a “precious deposit,” for framing in London. Emma contentedly reflects that he will suit Harriet perfectly, though his languishing air and flattery would be too much for she herself to endure.

Emma’s confidence in her good judgment and match-making skills steers her perception—and misperception—of the world.



CHAPTER 7

Harriet arrives at Hartfield flustered and pleased; she has received a marriage proposal from Mr. Martin by [letter](#) and come to seek Emma’s advice. Emma is surprised by how well-written the letter is and somewhat snidely supposes that one of Mr. Martin’s sisters helped him write it.

Harriet reveals the extent of her dependency on Emma’s judgment, which further reinforces Emma’s vanity. Meanwhile, Emma more deeply reveals the extent of her biases against the farmer class to which Mr. Martin belongs.



Emma behaves as though it is a given that Harriet will reject Mr. Martin and advises her to decline him promptly, unequivocally, and gratefully. When Harriet reveals that he is uncertain about her feelings towards her suitor, Emma feigns surprise. She at first declares she will not influence a decision that Harriet must make for herself, but then eventually starts gently guiding her friend to consider those candidates she considers to be more eligible.

Despite her ostensibly good intentions and affection for her friend, Emma will not allow her friend to make her own decisions about what will make her happiest. Instead, Emma cannot stop herself from manipulating Harriet into adopting her—Emma’s—own preferences.



Harriet rather uncertainly suggests that she will reject Mr. Martin; Emma immediately applauds her decision, and she declares that if Harriet had married him they would no longer be able to be friends. Harriet is horrified at the prospect that she could have lost Emma’s friendship.

Emma’s support and friendship is revealed to be conditional upon her friend following Emma’s own opinions, as she makes it clear that they could not have been friends if Harriet had chosen to marry Mr. Martin, a farmer.



The two rejoice over Harriet’s narrow escape, though Harriet continues to defend Mr. Martin’s amiability and goodness. Emma then proceeds to guide every sentence of Harriet’s reply [letter](#), even as Emma insists that her assistance is unnecessary.

Harriet’s loyal but somewhat blind following of Emma reveals both her weak will and the basis of their friendship in inequality: it works only so long as Harriet remains subservient to Emma’s will.



Emma congratulates herself on saving Harriet, though the latter remains somewhat despondent over the entire affair. However, Emma cheers her friend by reminding her of Mr. Elton’s warm regard.

Emma’s self-assurance that she has done right, despite her friend’s unhappiness, is rooted in her belief in the superiority of her judgment and feelings.



CHAPTER 8

Harriet continues to spend more and more time at Hartfield with Emma. Mr. Knightley visits while Harriet is out, and he reveals that Mr. Martin asked for his advice regarding his desire to marry Harriet. Mr. Knightley gave his full support to the match and anticipates Emma will celebrate the news with him as good for Harriet.

Emma, with some amusement, shares with Mr. Knightley that Harriet has already refused Mr. Martin. Mr. Knightley reacts with shock and displeasure, immediately guessing Emma's role in the rejection. He insists that Emma has done her friend a disservice, as the advantage of the match was all Harriet's: Mr. Martin possesses superior sense and "true gentility," while Harriet's only virtues are her prettiness and good temper. He continues that with Harriet's uncertain birth, inferior nature, and lack of education, she would have been lucky to marry Mr. Martin.

Emma heatedly counters that Mr. Martin is not her friend's equal as a farmer, as Harriet may yet be the daughter of a gentleman; in addition, her good temper and looks are highly desirable female traits to men. Mr. Knightley points out Harriet has grown up in Mrs. Goddard's inferior circle of society, and she was perfectly content with it until Emma befriended her and filled her mind with scorn and ambition beyond her set.

Mr. Knightley guesses that Emma has in mind a match between Harriet and Mr. Elton, and he informs her that Mr. Elton would never marry a woman without money. Mr. Knightley departs disappointed and vexed. Despite believing herself to be right about "female right and refinement," Emma is left distressed and uncertain. However, she is comforted when Harriet returns with the cheerful report that Mr. Elton has declared himself on an important errand involving a special lady.

Mr. Knightley again enters the text as a counter perspective to Emma's: unlike Emma, who views Mr. Martin as Harriet's unequal, he views the match between Mr. Martin and Harriet to be very desirable—particularly as marriage will provide good prospects for Harriet.



Emma's delight in her more intimate knowledge of the affair is quickly dampened by Mr. Knightley's accurate assessment that her knowledge stems from her interference. For the first time we see his anger in the real damage that Emma has done to two individuals—one of whom she calls her friend. Mr. Knightley also reveals a more nuanced, character-based understanding of "true gentility" in comparison to Emma's superficial class-based snobbery.



Emma maintains that Harriet is right to—and has the right to—refuse a farmer, pointing out that the superficial qualities of good temper and looks are in fact very important to most men. However, Mr. Knightley remains convinced that Emma has damaged her friend's prospects and character.



Mr. Knightley accurately perceives Emma's ambitions for Harriet and attempts to disillusion her. Though Mr. Knightley and Emma both stubbornly hold that they are right, Mr. Knightley's intervention into Emma's perspective leaves the reader suspecting Emma's misplaced vanity as the driver of her matchmaking.



CHAPTER 9

Emma's efforts to improve Harriet's mind with reading make little headway, but the two enjoy collecting **riddles** in a book. Emma asks Mr. Elton to compose one for them, and Mr. Elton returns with a riddle whose answer is "COURTSHIP." Emma decodes this romantic hint for the less quick-witted Harriet, who is happily flustered.

Despite Emma's proclaimed improvement of Harriet, she contributes little to Harriet's intellectual education. Emma prefers the excitement of "helping her friend" by matchmaking.



Mr. Woodhouse and Emma discuss the visit of Isabella's family at Christmas. During the course of the conversation, Mr. Woodhouse again sighs over "poor Isabella" who is so often forced away from Hartfield and frets over her children's rough-housing with their uncle. Emma gently reminds her father that Isabella happily prefers her husband's company, and that her children delight in being tossed about.

Mr. Woodhouse again comically reveals his tendency to impose his own sensitivity and preferences upon others, which skew his perceptions. Ironically, although Emma corrects her father's misperceptions, she remains blind to her own tendency to see the world as she desires.



When Mr. Elton visits later in the evening, Emma discerns his consciousness at having put himself forward. She shows him that they have decoded his admirable riddle and accepted it into Harriet's book, to which he responds with great emotion that he is deeply honored.

Despite Emma's nuanced reading of Mr. Elton and ability to solve his "riddle," she remains blind to the true interpretation underlying his actions and unwittingly encourages his attentions towards herself.



CHAPTER 10

In mid-December, Emma and Harriet make a charitable visit to a poor and sick family near Mr. Elton's vicarage. Harriet wonders that Emma remains single despite her charms, and Emma explains that she has no need to marry, and unless she should fall in love, it would be a mistake to marry.

Emma has none of "the usual inducements of women to marry" because of her high position in society and fortune. Implied is the reality of gender inequality in Austen's era, in which women must marry to gain financial security.



When Harriet frets that Emma will become an old maid like Miss Bates, Emma scornfully insists that the only thing she and Miss Bates could ever share in common is their singleness: Miss Bates is silly, ignorant, gossipy, and poor. Emma insists that there is no disadvantage in being an old maid except if you are poor, which renders celibacy contemptible to society.

Emma's strong will and independence are unusual for a woman in her era, and in this sense she is a remarkable heroine for gender equality. Yet her self-assurance stems from her financial security, which reveals the social inequality: Emma's ability to avoid marriage is dependent on her wealth.



The two women proceed to assist the impoverished family with great dedication, and they leave filled with compassion for the poor. When Mr. Elton runs into them as they return home, Emma attempts to give him time alone with Harriet by various means—stopping to tie her shoe, taking a different path, pausing at the vicarage for a shoelace—but to no avail. Emma is disappointed that Mr. Elton does not declare his love for Harriet, but she assumes he will propose soon enough.

Emma's charity reveals a favorable facet of compassion in her character, but it is one that is quickly superseded by her matchmaking schemes. She becomes immediately absorbed by her ambitions for Mr. Elton and Harriet, and the remainder of the chapter is dedicated to her elaborate, comical attempts to enable his proposal.



CHAPTER 11

Emma's attention is taken up by Mr. John Knightley and Isabella's visit to Hartfield. Isabella is an affectionate and obedient wife, who takes after her father's nervous disposition. Mr. John Knightley is respectable and gentlemanly, but reserved and often impatient with Mr. Woodhouse and his daughter's sensitivity.

Mr. John Knightley is spoiled by Isabella's adoration, resulting in an inequality in their temperament within their marital dynamic: Emma finds Mr. John Knightley lacking in respect for her father, Isabella, and their children.



Isabella commiserates with Mr. Woodhouse's grief over Mrs. Weston's departure. Emma and Mr. John Knightley gently moderate their dramatization of the situation with reminders that Mrs. Weston visits frequently and is happily married.

Isabella takes after her father's weak nerves, supporting Mr. Knightley's point that Emma is partially spoiled by her superior sense and intellect in comparison to the rest of her family.



Mr. John Knightley asks after Frank Churchill, and Emma replies that the expectation of his visit has ended in nothing. Frank's [letter](#) is praised again, and Mr. John Knightley and Isabella speculate about the relationship between Mr. Weston and his son.

Rumor plays a great role in reputation, as we are first introduced to characters like Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill by others' perceptions—and misperceptions—of them.



CHAPTER 12

Mr. Knightley finds Emma playing with her niece one evening during Isabella's visit, and she attempts to restore their friendship. He insists that his sixteen years of seniority and the advantage of not being a spoiled, pretty young woman have given him superior understanding. The two reconcile without either conceding the other's right.

The novel walks a tension between supporting Emma and her unusual independence as a female protagonist and critiquing her privileged prejudice through Mr. Knightley, who is a figure of paternal correction and is more often than not right.



Mr. Woodhouse and Isabella debate the merits of their favored physicians, Mr. Perry and Mr. Wingfield respectively. Isabella asks after Jane Fairfax, Miss Bates's niece, suggesting that she will make an amiable companion for Emma. Emma, however, is not fond of the accomplished and beautiful Jane; she finds all the attention and admiration generally given to Jane irksome.

Fidgety, foolish characters, like Mr. Woodhouse and Isabella, who have no real evil in them, compose much of the comedy in Austen. We are also introduced to others' favorable impressions of Jane Fairfax in contrast to Emma's perception of Jane as irritating and dull.



Mr. Woodhouse recommends that Isabella and Mrs. Mr. John Knightley switch their vacation spot according to Mr. Perry's advice, and Mr. John Knightley loses his temper at the old man's nervous interference. Mr. Knightley deftly changes the subject to less passionate matters, and Isabella and Emma gradually soothe away their father's distress.

Though Mr. Woodhouse has no malice in his fussiness, Mr. John Knightley loses patience at his attempt to impose his preferences on others. Emma, though more sophisticated and sensible than her father, also exhibits this tendency to mold the world to her liking.



CHAPTER 13

The Westons throw a Christmas Eve dinner party for their friends. Harriet, however, falls ill and cannot attend. Emma goes to see Harriet before the party and runs into Mr. Elton during her visit. He expresses much alarm at her friend's sickness. Emma suggests that he skip the party in the hopes that he will spend the evening with Harriet, but to her surprise he chooses to attend with great zest.

Much of the drama in Austen's novel revolves around the social functions that provide the setting for nuanced character interactions. Emma cannot properly read the nuances of Mr. Elton's behavior, because she is blinded by her perception of him as Harriet's lover.



Mr. John Knightley suspects that Mr. Elton is romantically interested in Emma and warns her accordingly. Emma laughingly dismisses the notion. She is mildly offended that her brother-in-law suspects her in need of advice, and she muses on the ignorant blunders that “people of high pretensions to judgment are for ever falling into.”

Despite his distance from the situation, Mr. John Knightley sees that Mr. Elton is wooing Emma. There is great irony in the fact that an outside, visiting observer can more accurately interpret the situation than Emma, who is intimately involved. In this case, her amused, disdainful assessment of Mr. John Knightley’s “pretensions to judgment” ironically better describe Emma, not him.



When Emma travels to the party in a carriage with Mr. Elton, they discuss Harriet’s sickness. Emma is increasingly astonished by his lack of concern for Harriet and his enthusiastic anticipation of the evening.

Austen begins to set the stage for Emma’s unpleasant revelation regarding Mr. Elton’s true feelings, as even Emma can no longer interpret his actions according to her desires.



CHAPTER 14

Upon their arrival at the Westons, Mr. Elton attentively shadows Emma, to her continued dismay. She begins to suspect that Mr. John Knightley may be right about his interest in her. Despite her alarm and vexation at Mr. Elton, she strives to remain civil and ladylike.

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.



Emma overhears Mr. Weston announce an upcoming visit from his son, 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.

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.



Mr. Weston mentions to Emma that Mrs. Weston suspects that Frank’s visit will be put off once more, because his son is so dependent upon the ill-tempered and snobbish Mrs. Churchill’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.

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.



Emma 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, however, insists that Mrs. Churchill is so unreasonable that one cannot judge Frank for his delay.

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.



CHAPTER 15

At the party, Mr. Elton continues to hover around Emma. 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.

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.



Mr. John Knightley announces that the heavy snow will soon make it impossible to travel. 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.

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.



To Emma's horror, once they are alone in the carriage, Mr. Elton 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.

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.



Mr. Elton insists that he has been interested in Emma 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.

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



When the extent of their misunderstanding becomes clear, Mr. Elton 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.

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.



CHAPTER 16

Full of pain and humiliation, Emma miserably reflects on the situation with Mr. Elton. In addition to her mortification at her mistake, she is thrown into confusion about how to re-evaluate the events of the previous weeks. However, she feels worst about the blow to Harriet, whose feelings she knows she encouraged towards Mr. Elton. Emma reflects that she would gladly have suffered greater humiliation and discomfort if she could only lessen the hurt for Harriet.

The vast majority of the chapter is devoted to Emma's self-reflection and remorse, a remarkable turning point for the proud protagonist. Forced to realize her error, we see more selfless thoughts developing: she would gladly endure a greater blow to her pride if she could lessen Harriet's potential heartbreak, which she feelingly takes responsibility for.



Emma feels little sympathy for Mr. Elton, whose showy displays of love she believes to be insincere. He sinks in her opinion as a man conceited, insensitive, and ambitious; she is sure that he has no real love for her, and his interest is only in marrying a wealthy heiress. She is doubly provoked that he is so sensible to the gradations of rank below him regarding Harriet, and so blind to those above as to believe him equal to Emma, whose wealth, family, and talents are greatly superior.

Emma's assessment of Mr. Elton does her less credit, as she is most offended by his presumption—both in believing her friend so below him, but also in believing him to be Emma's equal. Her ready dismissal of his feelings may be justified, as she realizes his arrogance and affectation, but she is at least in part responsible for his mistaken perception.



However, Emma pauses to reflect on her own responsibility for Mr. Elton's mistake. She reflects that her own behavior has been so pleasant and attentive to Mr. Elton for Harriet's sake that she can understand his misperception. She admits that if she has so misinterpreted him, she can hardly wonder that he, blinded by self-interest, has also mistaken her.

Emma reveals her ability to grow, as she possesses the intention and integrity to attempt a fair evaluation of herself and others. Though she, like Mr. Elton, is full of her own claims, she acknowledges that their misperceptions have both resulted from self-interest.



Emma concludes that she has been assuming and foolish in her attempt to make matches, "making light of what ought to be serious." Ashamed, she resolves to never match make again—though she catches herself thinking up another suitor for Harriet a moment later.

Emma learns from her mistake, but we find that she has still more to learn. She relapses into her matchmaking fantasies almost immediately after resolving to abstain from them.



CHAPTER 17

Mr. John Knightley and Isabella depart from Hartfield, despite 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."

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.



Mr. Elton sends a very formal, cold letter to Mr. Woodhouse—completely ignoring any address to Emma—announcing his departure for several weeks to Bath. Grateful for his absence, Emma resolves to break the dreadful news to Harriet immediately, to give her as much time as possible to recover before he returns.

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."



Harriet responds with unaffected tears, and Emma admires her humility and grace in receiving the news. Harriet blames no one; she continues to believe Mr. Elton "all perfection" and Emma faultless.

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



Emma leaves feeling humbled, and she strives to find a better way to help her friend than matchmaking. She moves Harriet to Hartfield for the remainder of her emotional recovery and attempts to comfort and distract her from thoughts of Mr. Elton. 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.

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.



CHAPTER 18

Mrs. Weston's fears are realized as Frank Churchill fails to visit, sending another [letter](#) of excuse. Emma sympathizes with and tries to ease Mrs. Weston's disappointment.

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.

When, later, Emma rather disingenuously exclaims to Mr. Knightley about the Churchills' fault for disappointing the Westons, Mr. Knightley voices her previous sentiment: a young man should not be so restricted by his guardians. He suspects that Frank could come if he liked in spite of the Churchills' wishes, but is not because of his own indifference towards his lower connections.

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.



Emma counters that Mr. 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's fancy [letters](#) are excuses from doing what is right. He finds them disgusting and anticipates that their writer is likely to be pretentious and insufferable.

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.



Emma anticipates that Frank will be charming and to everyone's taste. She concludes that they are both prejudiced, she for him, and Mr. 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.

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.



CHAPTER 19

On a walk with Harriet, Emma decides to call on the Bateses. Though she dislikes visiting them because they are tedious and keep "second and third rate" company, Mr. Knightley and her own conscience have often suggested that she call on them more often, as such visits are the greatest of their limited pleasures.

Though Emma has the sense and heart to know what is good, she is loath to sacrifice her own enjoyment for the sake of others. She does, however, possess a developing impulse of self-correction, aided by Mr. Knightley.



The garrulous Miss Bates pours forth solicitous inquiries and gossip about the town, mentioning the Coles, flattering Mr. Elton, and finally bringing up a [letter](#) from her niece Jane Fairfax. Orphaned at a young age, Jane lives with her guardians Colonel and Mrs. Campbell and is a great favorite within the community. Emma is determinedly polite as Miss Bates dotingly rambles on about Jane, despite finding Miss Bates silly and disliking Jane.

Miss Bates is considered by critics to be a masterpiece of comedy, as a foolish and gossipy spinster. Yet there is something also pitiable and sympathetic in the confinement of her life, which revolves around living with her mother and chatting about her small social set. Her ability to be easily cheered within her limitations is even admirable.



Miss Bates reports that Jane will be visiting Highbury next week, as the Campbells are leaving for Ireland to visit their newly married daughter and her husband, Mr. Dixon. Emma, fancifully weaving together innocent details from the narrative, suspects a previous romance between Jane and Mr. Dixon that prevents her from visiting Ireland with the Campbells.

Though Emma has sworn off matchmaking, her imagination is still active in spinning together intriguing romances and perceiving the world through her fancy. In the innocent chatter of Miss Bates, she manages to hear—to manufacture—a story of hidden love.



CHAPTER 20

After the death of Jane's father in battle and her mother from grief at the age of three, Jane was raised by Mrs. Bates and Miss Bates in Highbury. Several years later, Colonel Campbell, a friend of her father's, took her into his family, where she became much beloved. This gave her the opportunity for a superior education, which is particularly critical as she will have insufficient inheritance for independence and must become a governess or marry well. She grows into a fine young lady alongside the Campbells's own daughter, Miss Campbell, in good society.

As an orphan, Jane is dependent on the good graces of others. Had she not been taken in by her father's friend, she would have remained in poverty and ignorance comparable to Miss Bates—and, perhaps, met a similar fate as the rather silly spinster. With education, she gains the talents and grace that might make her attractive to a husband. At the least, education gives her the opportunity for employment, which offers the opportunity for moderate financial security in a socially acceptable position.



With Miss Campbell recently married to Mr. Dixon, Jane anticipates her time with the Campbells drawing to a close. She has resolved at the age of twenty-one to seek a position as governess, and she desires to spend her remaining months of freedom with her kind relations in Highbury who love her so dearly.

Jane reveals her responsible and un-pretentious nature, as she readily prepares to remove herself from her guardians' charity, giving up her life among high society to make her own way in the world.



Emma dreads her duty of calling on Jane, though she cannot quite find her own reasons for dislike justifiable: Jane's coldness and reserve, Jane's aunt's annoying chattiness, and the general fuss made over Jane. Mr. Knightley has suggested Emma dislikes Jane because Jane embodies all the accomplishment and elegance that Emma would like to be attributed to herself. Though Emma denies this, she feels a sense of guilt every time she sees Jane.

As with Frank, we meet Jane first through the impressions of others. By now we are accustomed to finding Emma's perspective biased by vanity and fancy and Mr. Knightley's sensible and discerning. Mr. Knightley's observations here set up Jane, another comparably accomplished and admired young woman, as a foil or rival for Emma.



When Emma encounters Jane this time, she admires her remarkable elegance and beauty. Emma feels compassion, too, for her impending poverty. However, Emma eventually relapses into her old dislike on Jane's next visit, as Emma finds Miss Bates tiresome, Jane overpraised, and Jane's manner "disgustingly . . . suspiciously reserved." Emma is also disappointed that Jane will speak little of either Mr. Dixon or Frank Churchill, the latter of whom Jane encountered at Weymouth.

Emma is a constant work in progress, as she attempts to evaluate Jane fairly. Yet even after generously admiring Jane at their first reunion, she slips irresistibly into the same petty judgments and biases against Jane. Emma's reasons for dislike remain shallow and motivated by her own fancy, as Jane's greatest fault is her reserve and the admiration she draws from others.



CHAPTER 21

Mr. Knightley visits the next morning to congratulate Emma on her improvement in manner towards Jane, only to discover that her distaste remains intact. The Bateses burst into the room to thank the Woodhouses for a gift of pork and report that Mr. Elton is going to be married to a Miss Hawkins. They chatter for a while and then depart.

Mr. Knightley's constant challenging of Emma's character reveals his attentive interest in her development; yet despite his critiques of Emma, he faithfully believes in her goodness and improvement.



Emma is pleased with this confirmation of the shallowness of Mr. Elton's professed love for her, but she is sorry for Harriet. Emma resolves to inform Harriet as soon as possible, to save her from hearing it from insensitive sources.

Despite the harm Emma has inadvertently done to Harriet, she possesses real feeling and concern for her friend's welfare and attempts to be active in its protection.



A flustered Harriet arrives at Hartfield; she has just run into Mr. Martin and his sister in town. Harriet felt very miserably trapped upon seeing them, but after the initial awkwardness both brother and sister approached her with great kindness. Harriet trembles with gratitude at the goodness of their behavior, which she points out with pleasure to Emma.

In spite of her weakness and dependency upon Emma, Harriet has a grateful and humble heart that recognizes the Martins's kindness and is wretched over wronging them. She is quick to admire the merits of others, with no inflated sense of her own.



Emma is unsettled, as she considers the good-hearted Martins. She feels some discomfort at her own judgment of them. However, she concludes that the evils of their low connections are more important, that she was right to protect Harriet from them, and she dismisses the affair.

Emma's good sense recognizes the Martins's remarkable kindness, but she cannot move past her snobbish assessment of their unworthiness due to their class.



Harriet, however, cannot stop thinking about the Martins, so Emma finally shares the news regarding Mr. Elton's engagement to distract her. Harriet's interest in Mr. Elton supersedes her turmoil over the Martins. Emma rests comforted by the fact that Harriet will now be forever safe from the Martins, altogether dismissing the significance of their enduring kindness towards her friend.

Emma easily manipulates the malleable Harriet, whose shifting attentions reveal a lack of conviction within her heart. However, Emma's excessive self-assurance reveals that conviction—particularly when it is misplaced—may be an even greater evil, as she inadvertently harms the friend she professes to protect.



CHAPTER 22

Favorable gossip circulates in the town about Miss Hawkins, Mr. Elton's fiancée. Mr. Elton, having left greatly offended, returns to town especially delighted to spread reports of his beautiful, accomplished, and amiable bride with an independent fortune.

Emma finds Mr. Elton even less agreeable than before with his airs of pretension, but she is grateful that his marriage will relieve the tension in their relations. She is pleased to find his bride no more well connected, though wealthier, than Harriet, in spite of Mr. Elton's disdain and self-importance.

Harriet's preoccupation with Mr. Elton continues, only to be distracted by a courteous visit from Mr. Martin's sister. Emma encourages Harriet to return the visit out of civility, though she ensures that Harriet will not stay too long and re-establish intimacy with the Martins by dropping her off and picking her up.

Mr. Elton's pride is apparent as he quickly moves from Emma to Miss Hawkins. His boasting in this second, swift success reveals his shallow sentiment and lack of grace.



Ironically, much of the snobbery that Emma finds distasteful and unfair in Mr. Elton's assessment of Harriet applies to Emma's own proud devaluation of Miss Hawkins and the Martins.



Despite Emma's belief that Harriet's nature is too shallow to love deeply, Harriet demonstrates a steadfast if silly attachment. Emma continues to control Harriet's affairs, believing her own judgment to be superior to her friend's.



CHAPTER 23

Harriet's visit with the Martins is distressing to all parties. Just as Harriet, Mrs. Martin, and the Martin sisters begin to recover their former familiarity and intimacy, Emma arrives to retrieve Harriet. The Martins perceive the intended slight of her visit's brevity, Harriet is miserable, and even Emma feels pained by the offense she has led Harriet to inflict upon the Martins. Nonetheless, Emma believes that the separation between the Martins and Harriet is for Harriet's own good.

Emma and Harriet run into a cheerful Mr. and Mrs. Weston on their return, who announce that Frank Churchill is to visit the next day. Frank arrives early, and Emma meets him at Hartfield. She finds him handsome, well bred, and charming; altogether, he meets her expectations, and she anticipates they will become fast friends. He knows how to make himself agreeable and is eager to please, generously praising Mrs. Weston to Emma's gratification.

Emma suspects that Mr. Weston watches eagerly for a developing attachment between herself and Frank, and Emma wonders if such suspicions have crossed Frank's mind as they have hers. At the end of his very agreeable visit, Frank mentions that he will drop by the Bates residence, to pay a visit to his acquaintance from Weymouth, Jane Fairfax.

Though Emma is not insensible to Harriet's pain and regrets offending the good-hearted Martins, her conviction of the Martins' social inferiority spurs her to continue to "protect" Harriet from them. Harriet, for her part, is too weak-willed to go against Emma's guidance, though she is soft-hearted enough to feel wretched about the affair.



Frank is exactly the charming young man Emma has anticipated, though her own biases have been known to lead her to find many characters to be just what she expects—and wants—they to be. It is too early, however, for even Emma to know the intentions that lie behind this young man's charm.



Within the rather confined circle of Emma's society, marriage is on everyone's mind. It is perhaps the most significant live event, and one that arrests not only Emma's too active imagination, but also in fact everyone's attention.



CHAPTER 24

Frank and Mrs. Weston visit Hartfield again the next day, and Emma is pleased to observe his cordiality and attention to his stepmother. She also approves of his desire to become acquainted with all his father's favorite neighborhood haunts, and when she later sees Mr. Knightley she informs him with a sense of triumph that Frank's prior delays could not have been voluntary.

Emma carefully observes Frank, and the importance she places on his treatment of his stepmother and her friend reveals both her loyalty and good sense.



Mrs. Weston and Emma introduce Frank to the town. When they arrive at the Crown Inn, Frank comes up with the idea that they should host a ball there. Emma protests against the mixing of families from such various ranks, but the lively Frank insists that such a gathering will be delightful. Emma notes with some surprise his lack of pride despite his privileged upbringing with the Churchills.

Frank exhibits less of the snobbery that we witness in Emma, as he has none of her qualms regarding the mixing of the classes in the merriment of a ball. On the other hand, his disregard for rank in this case may also be interpreted as the priority he places in pleasure over principle.



Frank discusses his visit with the Bateses, where he encountered the inescapably chatty Miss Bates. When Emma asks about his impression of Jane, Frank expresses distaste for her pale complexion. Emma learns that Frank saw much of Jane in Weymouth, as the two traveled in the same social set. When Emma shares her admiration of Jane's musical talent, Frank acknowledges that their general company at Weymouth—including Mr. Dixon—also thought highly of her musical abilities.

Frank's open, humorous report of Miss Bates's chattiness parallels Emma's own light-hearted remarks about the gossipy spinster. His ready distaste for Jane's complexion, however, is borderline rude, as even he acknowledges one cannot politely label a lady "ill-looking." He appears to share Emma's mixture of indifference and dislike towards Jane.



Emma laughingly probes into Mrs. Dixon's feelings about her husband's musical preference, hinting that Jane herself must have felt such favor to be inappropriate from a man engaged to be married. Frank at first resists Emma's insinuations, but then accedes to her greater knowledge of Jane.

Despite his impression that there is nothing indecorous between Jane and Mr. Dixon, he seems reluctant to contradict and eager to humor Emma, whose superior judgment he submits to.



Emma admits that she has never been close to Jane because of the latter's reserve; she has no reason to think poorly of Jane, but she has never been motivated to persevere over Jane's reserve and establish intimacy. Frank agreeably affirms the unattractiveness of reserved persons.

Emma's manner of talking about Jane reveals pride and privilege in her wealth of social acquaintances that she has never had to "persevere" to attain.



In spite of the brevity of their acquaintance, Emma feels that she knows Frank very well and that they think alike. In addition, Frank surpasses her expectations by being less spoiled and snobbish than Emma imagined a child of fortune would be. Frank expresses contentment at Mr. Elton's moderately sized house, which he believes could be comfortably shared by any man if it were with the woman he loved.

Frank's lively and agreeable manner—which is much like Emma's own disposition—combined with his general affirmation of her various opinions lead her to feel an intimacy and understanding of him disproportionate to the time they have spent together. Emma still tends to approve most of those people who agree with her.



CHAPTER 25

Emma's high opinion of Frank is shaken when she learns that he has dashed off to London just for a haircut, which she feels is rather vain and extravagant. However, she decides that he fits the honor she has imagined for him of being a suitable match for herself—though she still resolves to never marry. Mr. Knightley is the only person among their acquaintances who finds Frank trifling and silly.

Emma has resolved to decline any invitation from the Coles, a nouveau-riche family, in order to teach them their place. However, she feels mortified and unhappy when all of her friends are invited to a party and no invitation comes to Hartfield. When an invitation finally arrives, Emma is tempted by the prospect that all of her friends—Mr. Knightley, the Westons, and Harriet—are attending. She asks the Westons for their advice and decides to accept the invitation.

Mr. Woodhouse frets over the prospect of leaving his house for a dinner party. Emma insists that he had better stay home while she visits the Coles, and he reluctantly agrees on the condition that she will take all precautions for her health on the perilous visit out.

Emma's good sense regarding the extravagance of a day trip to London for a haircut is compromised by her vanity, as she continues to hold a high regard for Frank as the superior man she and others have paired with her in their minds. Knightley, however, only sees Frank to be the silly man he expected all along.



Emma's feelings regarding the affair with the Coles are rather comical, revealing both her snobbery and vanity. Though she believes the Coles below her and wants to teach them not to presume on "superior families," she feels left out when no invitation comes—she wants the power to reject them—and ultimately decides to attend when everyone else is.



Mr. Woodhouse is irrationally concerned about the discomforts of a dinner out, as everyone around him solicitously ensures the sheltered old man is made comfortable—as usual.



CHAPTER 26

Frank returns with his haircut, lively and flippant about the experiences. Emma defends his behavior to Mr. Knightley, arguing that an exception should be made for silly things done by sensible people.

Mr. Knightley arrives at the Coles by carriage, though he usually prefers walking. Emma approves of this change, which she declares fits his gentlemanly station better. Emma anticipates a pleasurable evening at the party, and is pleased with the special attention that Frank displays toward her.

Mrs. Cole shares that Jane has received the surprise gift of a piano, which everyone assumes to be from Colonel Campbell. Emma, however, suspects that it is a gift from Mr. Dixon and prods Frank into agreeably sharing her suspicion. As she talks with Frank, Emma learns more about him and his situation at Enscombe. Frank says he has great influence with his aunt, and excepting one point that he does not mention, believes he may persuade her to anything.

Emma is inconsistent in approving or disapproving of people's actions based on her predispositions and prejudices.



Mr. Knightley and Emma hold different views of what makes a gentleman, with Emma's valuing superficial graces more than Mr. Knightley.



Despite Emma's resolution not to make matches for others, she continues to imagine she can to discern what others cannot. She exercises her vanity and fancy by interpreting the gift of the piano as support for her suspicions regarding Jane and Mr. Dixon. She fails to notice, however, the inconsistencies regarding Frank's account of his own situation at Enscombe.



Mrs. Weston informs Emma that Mr. Knightley has come in his carriage so that he can assist Jane home. Mrs. Weston imagines a match between Mr. Knightley and Jane, but Emma reacts violently against the suggestion. She declares that Mr. Knightley must not marry and deprive her nephew, Henry, of inheriting Donwell Abbey; Emma feels such a match to the impoverished Jane would be imprudent and shameful, additionally connecting Mr. Knightley to the frivolous Miss Bates. Nonetheless, Mrs. Weston believes the piano to be Mr. Knightley's gift.

Emma protests when Mrs. Weston takes up her pastime of matchmaking, and she takes particular offense at the notion of Mr. Knightley marrying at all. Why she reacts so vehemently is slightly unclear, though it appears to be a combination of her usual snobbery regarding those with lower connections and personal concern for her nephew's (i.e. her sister's son) inheritance and welfare.



The guests call for musical entertainment, and Emma leads the piano playing with pleasure. Frank accompanies, and then Emma resigns her place to Jane, whose talent she acknowledges to be superior. After several songs, Mr. Knightley prevents the company from tiring out Jane's voice. Music is replaced by dancing, and Frank immediately asks Emma to be his partner. Emma is relieved that Mr. Knightley does not ask Jane. She leaves the party happy with Frank's favor and reassured of Mr. Knightley's lack of romantic interest in Jane.

Music and dancing are conventional entertainments for Austen's society, and they are two talents that signal accomplishment in young ladies. As with many of these accomplishments for the class of genteel characters, they result from a combination of talent and privilege. Mr. Knightley's actions demonstrate his consideration of others, ensuring that the company's entertainment does not take precedence over Jane's health.



CHAPTER 27

Emma deems her delightful evening at the Coles worth the loss in "dignified seclusion," though she feels some guilt about sharing her unfavorable suspicions towards Jane with Frank. Reflecting on Jane's superior musical performance, Emma practices piano. As she is playing Harriet arrives and applauds her performance.

Emma's discomfort regarding Jane stems from a combination of jealousy and self-awareness; Jane holds up an unsettling alternative vision of accomplishment that push Emma to improve her piano playing.



Harriet, with some distress, shares a report she has heard that the Cox daughters are interested in marrying Mr. Martin. Emma rather coldly declares the Cox family to be very vulgar.

Emma continues to disregard all signs of Mr. Martin's worthiness, including the good opinion of others regarding Mr. Martin.



Emma and Harriet then go to visit the Bateses, and run into Mrs. Weston and Frank in town on the way. Frank had reminded Mrs. Weston of a promise she supposedly made to hear the new piano, though Frank now offers to stay with Emma while Mrs. Weston goes on. However, Miss Bates soon enters the store herself and persuades Emma and Harriet to drop by as well. After much chattering about all manner of things including Mr. Knightley's gift of Jane's favorite apples, Miss Bates leads them back to her humble abode.

Frank's behavior reveals certain inconsistencies regarding the Bateses. Although he professes to find visits with them tiresome, he insists that his stepmother and he visit them. Yet, even after this suggestion, Frank appears willing to abandon the visit when encountering Emma and Harriet in town. Meanwhile, Mr. Knightley continues to reveal a genuine kindness and charity towards the Bateses.



CHAPTER 28

Emma finds Frank fixing Mrs. Bates's spectacles and Jane at the piano. After Frank adjusts the piano for her, Jane plays delightfully. When Frank teases her about the mysterious gift, Emma notes Jane's pleased blush and suspects her to harbor inappropriate feelings for Mr. Dixon. Nonetheless, she asks Frank to cease his teasing, which he cannot seem to resist.

The interactions between Frank, Jane, and Emma are interpreted differently by each character. As readers, we follow Emma's misperception that Frank unkindly teases Jane about Mr. Dixon and favors Emma. However, their true relations will eventually unravel these misperceptions.



Mr. Knightley stops by the house to ask after Jane's health. Mrs. Weston gives Emma a knowing look, but Emma shakes her head with skepticism. When Mr. Knightley learns that Frank is in, he decides not to stay and continues on his way. Emma and Harriet leave soon after.

Mrs. Weston and Emma also interpret Mr. Knightley's behavior differently, and the nature of his feelings towards Jane remains unclear. However, his dislike for Frank could not be more obvious.



CHAPTER 29

Frank persists with his scheme for a ball, and Emma assists. They plan for ten couples, measure out the dimensions of various rooms, and decide on the Crown Inn. Mr. Woodhouse frets over the dangers of catching colds at inns, but Emma assuages his fears.

Dances are one of the favorite pastimes of young people in Austen's society. Frank's delight for entertainment is evident; his lively disposition actively seeks enjoyment.



After some more debate about the technical details of the ball, Frank proposes that they get second opinions from their neighbors. He runs off to fetch Miss Bates and Jane. Miss Bates gives her warm approval, and all anticipate the dance with pleasure. Frank requests the first two dances with Emma, which Mr. Weston notes with quiet delight to Mrs. Weston.

Frank displays an energetic and determined interest in the ball. He willfully perseveres through all technical difficulties and debate to ensure that everything will be taken care of and that nothing will spoil the evening of entertainment that he desires.



CHAPTER 30

Plans for the ball are set. Emma finds Mr. Knightley's indifference towards it annoying, as he seems determined against enjoying himself there. Emma feels slighted, but she considers his attitude to be evidence for his lack of interest in Jane, who anticipates the ball with pleasure.

Emma and Frank are both characters who are preoccupied with their own pleasure; though good-natured, they are often insensitive and dismissive of feelings that differ from theirs.



However, plans for the ball are cut short when a letter from Mrs. Churchill calls Frank home on account of her ill-health. Frank calls on Emma before he leaves, and he displays distress and hesitation. He seems about to confess something serious, and Emma supposes he is even more in love with her than she realized. She is relieved when Mr. Weston's entrance interrupts their conversation, preventing Frank from completing whatever he intended to say.

Frank's behavior appears to the reader and Emma as love for her. Yet, unbeknownst to us, there is another reading behind his hesitation: he believes Emma is aware of his secret with Jane. Frank interprets Emma's understanding exactly as is convenient for him, displaying the same self-interested misperceptions that affect Emma.



Emma misses Frank after he is gone, and she reflects on his good qualities and what she believes to have been his almost confession of love for her. As she notes her own feelings of listlessness and Frank's many virtues, she concludes that she must be "a little in love with him." With some sighing, Emma thinks how dull and tedious Hartfield will be without him. Mr. Knightley, however, seems cheerful about Frank's departure—though he sympathizes with others' disappointment.

Emma's self-conscious assessment of her feelings is somewhat comical, as it reveals the extent to which she delights in control. Just as she orchestrates everyone else's lives around her according to her fancies, she also measures her own feelings against the pleasant romantic narrative she has devised for herself.



CHAPTER 31

Emma continues to imagine herself in love with Frank and fantasizes various scenarios of their dalliance. However, all of them end in her rejection of him and the subsiding of their romance into friendship. Emma concludes she is happier remaining single, and she believes Frank's feelings for her to be warm but changeable.

Despite Emma's imagined love for Frank, it is an affection that leaves her with no doubt that she is still perfectly in control of the situation. It is not the kind of love that disarms and humbles Emma as Mr. Knightley wishes for her earlier in the novel.



Mrs. Weston receives a [letter](#) from Frank, which Emma reads with great pleasure. A mention of Harriet in the letter makes Emma briefly speculate that her friend might replace her in Frank's affections, but then remembers her vow to abstain from matchmaking.

Emma cannot resist the impulses of her fancy, even under rather ridiculous circumstances, as she pleasantly imagines a match between Harriet and the man she claims to be in love with. This also, of course, calls into question the depth of Emma's "love" for Frank.



Mr. Elton now becomes the center of attention for town gossip, in light of his impending arrival accompanied by his bride. Emma attempts to comfort the flustered Harriet, and she at last begs her friend to cease dwelling on Mr. Elton for Emma's own sake. This appeal works immediately, and Emma is warmed by Harriet's deep love for her. She feels that such tenderness of heart cannot be esteemed highly enough, and that Harriet is her superior in this regard.

The confined nature of town life results in its changeable preoccupation with various social changes—the arrival of a stranger, or a marriage, being of great excitement. Harriet remains particularly tender and vulnerable in regard to Mr. Elton, and it is only her love for Emma—neither concern for her own well being nor for her dignity—that compels her to refrain from active distress. Harriet forces herself to not be sad for the benefit of Emma, which feeds Emma's own vanity.



CHAPTER 32

Mrs. Elton arrives, and Emma resolves to pay her respects with Harriet. The visit results in unpleasant recollections and awkwardness from Mr. Elton, but Emma refrains from judging Mrs. Elton too soon, though she leaves with the impression that Mrs. Elton is unimpressive.

Emma, with somewhat surprising fairness, reserves her judgment the first time that she meets Mrs. Elton.



Mrs. Elton's following visit to Hartfield, however, convinces Emma that the new bride is a vain and self-important woman. Mrs. Elton displays many of the gauche superficialities of the nouveau-riche. Mrs. Elton's over-familiarity particularly offends Emma; Mrs. Elton proposes they start a musical club together as though they were already intimate friends, and she further provokes Emma by presumptively referring to Mr. Knightley as "Knightley." Emma also finds Mrs. Elton's offer to help her make social connections outrageous.

Mrs. Elton quickly gains Emma's ill-opinion, however, by not only displaying her own self-importance but also offending Emma's. By presuming such familiarity with Emma and the neighbors, Mrs. Elton behaves as though she were on equal footing with Emma and Mr. Knightley. Indeed, Mrs. Elton's offer to socially introduce Emma to her friends presumes that she possesses certain advantages over Emma, which is both presumptuous and false.



Emma concludes that Mrs. Elton is insufferable and vulgar, with many pretensions but little real grace. She feels Harriet, for all her lack of refinement, is much her superior. Mr. Woodhouse, however, only complacently observes that Mrs. Elton seems a nice young lady. He remarks that a bride holds a particularly special rank in society, the "first in company."

Exactly what marks any given individual at the top of the social ladder can be quite confusing. Social connections and wealth, manners and virtue . . . there seems a fine line between real elegance and pretentious airs, and it requires considerable discernment to mark out real superiority.



CHAPTER 33

Further encounters with Mrs. Elton confirm Emma's poor opinion of her. In response, Mrs. Elton observes Emma's reserve and grows colder towards her. She pours out affection on Jane instead, whom she socially takes under her wing. To Emma's surprise, Jane seems to accept and tolerate Mrs. Elton's behavior.

Mrs. Elton's desire to take Jane under her wing parallels Emma's own relationship with Harriet. For all their mutual dislike of each other, both women are full of their own importance and charity, though the novel does present Emma as having a certain grace that Mrs. Elton distinctly lacks. In some ways, Mrs. Elton is like a coarse double of Emma, showing what Emma might have been had she lacked all her other blessings and her willingness to self-examine and change her own behavior.



Jane receives a second invitation to join the Dixons in Ireland, but she declines and decides to stay in Highbury. Emma suspects Jane must be punishing herself regarding her feelings for Mr. Dixon.

Emma continues to interpret the puzzle of Jane according to her own fancy, even as Jane's real motives remain mysterious to the reader.



Mrs. Weston, Emma, and Mr. Knightley discuss Jane's complaisance towards Mrs. Elton's attentions. When Mr. Knightley warmly defends Jane's judgment, Emma teases him about the extent of his admiration for Jane. Mr. Knightley colors, but he believes Jane would never have him and makes it clear that he has no romantic interest in her. Despite his great admiration for her, he finds her too reserved. Emma quietly rejoices—both in Mr. Knightley's security, and in the acknowledged flaw.

Emma's concern that Mr. Knightley remain her single friend stems from the compound desire to keep her friend to herself and jealousy of Jane. However, Mr. Knightley demonstrates that he is perfectly capable of holding a disinterested and selfless regard for that which he deems good and beautiful, without any personal claims or pride involved.



CHAPTER 34

Mrs. Elton receives social attention from everyone in town. Emma plans a dinner for the Eltons at Hartfield, eager to extricate herself from any suspicions that she harbors ill feelings towards Mrs. Elton (even though she does). When Harriet cannot come, Emma takes the opportunity of amending her neglect of Jane and invites her instead. She also invites Isabella and John Knightley, who will be in the area.

During the party, Mr. John Knightley talks with Jane, solicitously scolding her for walking through the rain to fetch her [letters](#). Jane blushes but insists that she enjoys her walks and values letters of friendship. Mrs. Elton overhears and decides that she will have her servant fetch Jane's letters for her, but Jane just as determinedly objects that she will continue to fetch her own letters. Emma suspects that Jane has been receiving letters from some one very dear, whom she keeps secret.

The conversation turns to handwriting, and Emma's handwriting is praised. Emma in turn praises Frank's handwriting, but Mr. Knightley counters that it is weak and womanly.

Emma, very aware of her social rank, is also aware of her social obligations. Her pride ensures that she carries out every duty expected towards Mrs. Elton, and it also spurs her to improve her behavior towards Jane Fairfax.



Here, as in other cases, Emma interprets more interesting motives behind Jane's determination to fetch her own letters. She continues to interpret Jane's behavior through the narrative she has created between Jane and Mr. Dixon. Ironically, Emma is half-right: there is a secret story regarding those letters, but it involves not Dixon but rather the very man Emma believes is in love with her, Emma! So even when Emma's insight is right about a situation, her fancies and vanities still stop her from getting it entirely right.



Emma and Mr. Knightley continue to disagree over their impressions of Frank, this time literally reading personality between the lines of his handwriting.



CHAPTER 35

When the ladies retire to the drawing room after dinner, Mrs. Elton continues to impose her services on Jane. After failing to get her way with the [letters](#), she insists on helping Jane attain a governess position. Jane, however, informs her that she will not make any inquiries until after she sees the Campbells in midsummer.

Mr. Weston joins the party after a day in London. The introverted Mr. John Knightley is amazed that Mr. Weston should desire to socialize instead of staying home after such a day of business and travel. Mr. Weston, however, happily announces that he bears a [letter](#) from Frank. The letter announces his impending visit, to the delight of Mrs. Weston, the agitation of Emma, and the indifference of Mr. Knightley.

Mrs. Elton's attempt to help Jane out is part comical and part aggravating, as Jane clearly does not want her services with letters or job hunting. Indeed, though Mrs. Elton does not know it, such "assistance" would actually be a disservice to Jane's plans. She does not want to be a governess. She wants to marry Frank.



Austen's character sketches are lively and thorough, as she enters various—even minor—characters' perspectives and delineates their perception of others. Mr. Weston's sociability baffles the more reserved Mr. John Knightley.



CHAPTER 36

Mr. Weston delightedly engages Mrs. Elton in conversation, chatting about his son Frank and the difficult Mrs. Churchill. Mrs. Elton proclaims herself a defender of her sex, and she introduces the subject of her own female relations and justifies the fussiness of fine ladies. Mrs. Elton actively fishes for compliments, while Mr. Weston indulges in talking about Frank. When Mr. Weston complains that Mrs. Churchill, for all her pride, was nobody until she married well, Mrs. Elton shudders with horror at such “upstarts”—she is disgusted with people of low connections who give themselves airs.

Mr. Weston and Mrs. Elton's dialogue is comical, as the two continue talking past each other about themselves. Austen here pokes fun at the self-absorption of human nature, as the two characters use each other to indulge in their various prides: Mrs. Elton's social connection and Mr. Weston's son. Ironically, Mrs. Elton's disgust at social upstarts precisely mirrors Emma's own sentiment towards her; Emma views Mrs. Elton as having an irritatingly inflated view of her own social connections.



The two are interrupted by tea. Mr. John Knightley instructs Emma regarding his sons, who are staying at Hartfield for a little while. He observes that Emma has become much more social, and Mr. Knightley proposes that he will take care of his brother's children instead. Emma objects that she has far more leisure than Mr. Knightley, who is constantly managing his estate.

Emma's busy-ness stems from her active social life, the result of a privileged life and sociable nature that keeps her from boredom. However, as Emma herself argues, she has much more leisure as a gentlewoman than Mr. Knightley, who, in addition to meeting social obligations, additionally has to take care of business. Such as the difference between the roles of men and women in Austen's time.



CHAPTER 37

Emma anticipates Frank's return with concern that she must disappoint his feelings. She believes her own affections have subsided to insignificance, but that Frank has always been the more in love of the two. However, when he visits Hartfield for only a brief fifteen minutes before dashing off to make other social calls, Emma concludes he must also be less in love than previously.

Emma continues to believe Frank to be in love with her, as she has interpreted all of his actions according to the immense gratification of her own vanity. However, she is not cruel: she has no desire to encourage unrequited affection, and desires to protect his feelings as much as possible and watches accordingly.



Frank soon departs for London again, on account of Mrs. Churchill's illness. She has decided that they must move from London to Richmond, which will be better for her nerves and health. This move brings Frank closer to Highbury, to the delight of the Westons and Frank himself. Mr. Weston can finally hold the ball with certainty, and Mr. Woodhouse resigns himself to the evils of such excitement.

Mrs. Churchill's health and whims are a major factor in directing Frank's fate. Though he is indeed a privileged young man, he is still reliant upon his guardian and benefactress for many of his pleasures. Indeed, as we will discover, he cannot marry against her wishes as he financially depends on her (though of course he could also do as Mr. Weston did and make his own way in the world, which Frank seems unwilling to do).



CHAPTER 38

Emma arrives early to the ball at the special invitation of Mr. Weston, only to discover that he has also extended this flattering invitation to several other “favored” friends. She considers that such general favoritism is not particularly flattering.

Emma's vanity and consciousness regarding social privileges is piqued by the fact that her special invitation is shared by so many of Mr. Weston's other friends.



Frank restlessly awaits the guests, and he runs out to escort Miss Bates and Jane. Mrs. Elton behaves officiously, lavishly praising Frank and greeting guests as though she were herself the hostess. Frank disapproves of her familiarity with Jane, and he quietly declares his dislike for Mrs. Elton to Emma. Emma responds that he is ungrateful. He protests and seems agitated.

Frank's behavior puzzles Emma, though she in part attributes his agitation and restlessness to his feelings for her. Yet the pieces do not quite add up; he reads strange meaning into her words. His dislike of Mrs. Elton, though, confirms Emma's sense of her as a generally presumptuous busybody.



Though the Westons desired to give Emma the honor of leading the dance, they realize that Mrs. Elton expects it. To Emma's dismay, Mr. Weston and Mrs. Elton lead the dance. Her demotion is "almost enough to make her think of marrying." However, she anticipates a delightful evening; she only wishes Mr. Knightley would join in the dancing, too.

The order of dancing contains its own set of hierarchy, as the first couple holds the position of highest honor. Emma is mortified that she must come second to the newly married Mrs. Elton, comically reflecting that the latter's privilege is almost enough to make one consider marriage.



During one of the sets, Harriet is the only lady with no partner. Mr. Elton deliberately snubs her, gleefully refusing to ask her to dance. Mr. Knightley, however, saves the day and leads Harriet into the dance. His chivalry thwarts Mr. Elton's attempt to humiliate Harriet, to Emma's immense gratitude and pleasure.

Mr. Elton's deliberate snub towards Harriet reveals his pride and cruelty. Mr. Knightley, in turn, reveals his charity and chivalry in rescuing Harriet; he wields social clout responsibly and kindly.



Emma thanks Mr. Knightley warmly, and he observes that they intended to slight Emma as well. She confesses her mistakes regarding the Eltons and admits that Mr. Knightley was right. In return, Mr. Knightley shares that Harriet would have been a much worthier wife—unpretentious, honest, and devoted—than Mrs. Elton. They conclude these warm concessions with a dance.

Emma and Mr. Knightley's interactions reveal real warmth towards each other, as Emma truly values—though she does not always enjoy—Mr. Knightley's guidance. Mr. Knightley's very sternness shows his faith in Emma's goodness and ability to improve herself. His willingness to critique her as an equal is a compliment.



CHAPTER 39

Emma reflects with pleasure on the events of the ball: Mr. Knightley and her own shared understanding of the rude Eltons and the amiability of Harriet, Frank's diminished love for her, and Harriet's disillusionment regarding Mr. Elton. For after the episode at the ball, Emma has hopes that Harriet's enduring love for Mr. Elton will be quite destroyed.

Emma's reflections regarding the ball do her credit, as her pleasure is largely selfless: she delights in the agreement between her and Mr. Knightley, the thwarting of the Eltons' rudeness, and the healing of Harriet.



Frank arrives at Hartfield unexpectedly, with a frightened and pale Harriet on his arm. It turns out that Harriet and a friend had been accosted by a gypsy child, begging for money, on their walk. Her friend had run away, but Harriet was unable to escape. More gypsies surrounded her, when Frank arrived on the scene and chased them away. He then escorted her to Hartfield.

The episode dramatizes the vulnerability that Harriet experiences as a young, unmarried lady with no man to "protect" her. She is physically helpless and prey to the gypsies, a vagabond group that lay outside Austen's social system altogether. Their intrusion into the domestic realism of Highbury is as puzzling as it is dramatic.



Once Harriet's safety is assured, Emma considers with some pleasure that the adventure may spark attraction between Harriet and Frank—though she resolves that she will not actively involve herself. News of the episode speeds throughout Highbury, alarming Mr. Woodhouse, but the gypsies soon take off. The gossip subsides into an exciting story Emma tells her nephews.

Despite her resolution to refrain from meddling in others' love lives, Emma's active imagination continues to envision matches. Emma's fancy forms from the exciting incident of the gypsies a love story conforming to the conventions of the romantic melodrama genre.



CHAPTER 40

Harriet arrives at Hartfield some time later, and reveals to Emma her intentions to dispose of all former "tokens of affection" from Mr. Elton that she has previously cherished: a bit of bandage she gave Mr. Elton to bind his finger, and the remnant of a discarded pencil he once used. Harriet declares her shame that she ever thought him so perfect, and she throws these silly trinkets into the fire.

The extent of Harriet's folly and devotion regarding Mr. Elton becomes clear, as we learn the "tokens of affection" she has been cherishing—pieces of rubbish. The episode reveals the extent of Harriet's initial ridiculous enchantment with Mr. Elton, her current disillusionment with him, and Emma's unknowing damage to her friend's feelings.



Harriet then declares her decision to never marry, as the one whom she now admires is too far above her. Emma believes she means Frank, and she eagerly affirms that Harriet's feelings are understandable, given the service he rendered her. Neither Harriet nor Emma ever explicitly mention the gentleman in question by name; Harriet refers to his rescue with warmth, and Emma encourages her to proceed with caution but allow herself hope—there have been matches of greater disparity yet.

Though Harriet's infatuation has been long lasting, it is quickly replaced. Emma attempts to be more discreet and less involved in the new match, but ironically this discretion in discussing Harriet's new preference actually creates more opportunity for misperception, as Harriet is in fact referring to Mr. Knightley.



CHAPTER 41

Mr. Knightley begins to suspect Frank of double dealing with Emma and Jane. He knows that Emma is ostensibly the subject of Frank's admiration, but he reads symptoms of a secret understanding and admiration between Frank and Jane. He observes a peculiar incident on a group walk to Hartfield, in which Frank asks Mrs. Weston about Mr. Perry's plan to set up his carriage, referring to information from a [letter](#) she sent him. However, Mrs. Weston has no idea what he is talking about, and Frank laughingly declares he must have dreamt it up. Miss Bates declares full knowledge of Perry's plan for the carriage, as Mrs. Perry shared this secret with the Bateses—leading Mr. Knightley to suspect a secret communication between Frank and Jane.

Mr. Knightley, despite his cautious disdain for coming to fanciful conclusions through imagined hints, finds himself reading signs of a romance between Jane and Frank. Throughout the course of the novel, Emma, Mrs. Weston, and finally Mr. Knightley play a detective game of sorts in their attempts to piece together the signs of attraction between various characters. However, each is guided and influenced by his or her own desires for drawing certain conclusions. In Mr. Knightley's case, his early dislike for Frank renders him attentive to Frank's flaws.



The party arrives at Hartfield, and Frank proposes a word game in which they unscramble alphabet tiles. Mr. Knightley seats himself near to observe. Jane unscrambles Frank's puzzle, "blunder," with a blush of consciousness. Frank then sends Emma "Dixon," which amuses her and angers Jane. Mr. Knightley indignantly suspects that these word games conceal Frank's deeper game of gallantry and trick.

Word games provide the medium for the romantic speculation and intrigue that runs throughout the entire novel. Frank's puzzles allow divergent interpretations for Emma and Jane, but remain incomprehensible to Mr. Knightley. Only those with the inside knowledge can crack the code of Frank's intentions. At the same time, Frank's games reveal again that in his fun-loving daringness he can be callous and reckless, even hurting the feelings of Jane, whom he loves.



Mr. Knightley stays behind to warn Emma, despite his concern that his interference with her affections for Frank will be unwelcome. He tells her about his suspicions regarding Frank and Jane, but she laughingly assures Mr. Knightley that she can answer for Frank's complete indifference towards Jane. Mr. Knightley is unhappy by the intimation that Emma possesses such an intimate knowledge of Frank.

Mr. Knightley proves again that he is willing to risk Emma's good feelings towards him in order to help her out. The emphasis on Mr. Knightley's perspective allows us to view Emma, Jane, and Frank from a different light separate from Emma's biases—though also revealing some of Mr. Knightley's heart.



CHAPTER 42

When Mrs. Elton's rich relatives fail to visit, Mr. Weston suggests that their parties (Emma and her friends with Mrs. Elton and her friends) merge in an outing to Box Hill. However, a lame horse forces the postponement of the outing, and Mrs. Elton seizes instead on Mr. Knightley's passing invitation to explore his estate, Donwell Abbey. She eagerly begins to make the arrangements, but Mr. Knightley asserts his authority over them. Meanwhile, the lame horse heals and the Box Hill trip is planned to follow the next day.

Mrs. Elton and Emma's set are constantly looking for a diversion, as the little town of Highbury provides limited excitement. When there are no new marriages or visitors, they rely on social visits and nature outings for entertainment. Mrs. Elton is as eager as ever to seize upon any invitations that may gratify her vanity.



At Donwell, Emma regards her friend's estate with pleasure and pride. Mrs. Elton badgers Jane to accept a governess position that she has found for her, and Jane finally removes herself by proposing a walk. Emma spots Mr. Knightley and Harriet in pleasant conversation leading the way.

Mr. Knightley reveals himself to be a generous judge of character, as he willingly amends his opinion of Harriet to include more virtues than he initially allowed. Emma shows her true generosity in delighting in her friend's fortune.



Mrs. Weston worries at Frank's delay, as he is expected from Richmond. While cooling off in the house, Emma encounters an agitated Jane. Jane appears distressed and exhausted, and she asks Emma to inform the others that she has left for home. Emma feels some sympathy for her. Just then, an out of humor Frank arrives. He has run into Jane as she left, and he complains about the heat. However, he agrees to join the Box Hill expedition the next day.

Emma begins to sympathize with Jane's forbearance of her irritating friends, as she observes Jane's real distress and desire for solitude. She realizes that despite Jane's reserve, Jane must feel considerable irritation towards those who love her best—her annoying aunt and the presumptuous Mrs. Elton.



CHAPTER 43

Though the trip to Box Hill is initially dull during the walk, Frank livens up when they all sit down. Frank and Emma flirt excessively, though in Emma's mind it is all meaningless play. The rest of the party sits listlessly, so Frank gallantly orders the company to share their thoughts with Emma. Some are amused, others affronted. Frank then requests either one thing very clever, two things moderately clever, or three things very dull indeed.

When Miss Bates good-humoredly declares she will easily supply three dull things, Emma quips that she will have a great difficulty refraining from supplying *only* three. Miss Bates, hurt, blushes and murmurs to Mr. Knightley that she must be very annoying indeed or Emma would not have embarrassed her like that.

Mr. Weston presents a [riddle](#) in praise of Emma, and Mrs. Elton and Mr. Elton huffily excuse themselves from the game. Frank observes that they are fortunate to have such a well-matched marriage, given that brief acquaintances before marriage do not often turn out well. Jane objects that such acquaintances only sour in the face of weak, irresolute characters. Frank playfully commissions Emma to choose a wife for him. Jane, Miss Bates, and Mr. Knightley also depart for a walk from the group.

As the outing ends, Mr. Knightley quietly reprimands Emma for her insolent and insensitive behavior to Miss Bates. When she tries to laugh it off, he insists that it is wrong of the privileged Emma to use her wit against a poor, helpless spinster: she sets a cruel example for others to follow. Emma is deeply distressed, mortified, and angry with herself. She weeps the entire way home.

Frank and Emma display a selfish disregard towards the company they are with, before which they flirt excessively and meaninglessly for their own entertainment. Indeed, they only turn to the others when Frank decides to create more entertainment involving them in his gallantry towards Emma.



Emma also uses the comparably slow-witted Miss Bates as the butt of her joke, though it is an unkind one that clearly hurts the chatty spinster. However, Miss Bates herself generously attributes the blame to her own dullness, revealing her own good will.



Frank and Jane's discussion about the fate of marriages between brief acquaintances made in public places possesses a subtext, which refers to the many difficulties arising in their own relationship. Though marriage is such a central force in their society, it becomes clear that it is not always easy to either choose or keep a good mate, which requires resolution.



Mr. Knightley again reveals the depth of his friendship, as he persists in correcting Emma in spite of his belief that she resents his advice. He reminds her that Miss Bates's poverty and social situation demand compassion from the privileged Emma. Emma's distress and receptivity towards his criticism also reveals that she is changing, humbled and repentant.



CHAPTER 44

Emma reflects miserably about the Box Hill expedition. She comforts herself a little regarding her good behavior to her father, but her conscience continues to torture her regarding her treatment of Miss Bates. The very next morning, Emma resolves to visit Miss Bates regularly.

Emma again demonstrates her ability to be severe on herself and improve. To her credit, once convicted of her faults, Emma earnestly attempts to correct them and improve her behavior.



Emma arrives at the Bateses to find Jane unwell, and she is ushered into the bedroom. Miss Bates's gratitude further humbles Emma. Emma learns that Jane has just accepted the governess position Mrs. Elton found for her; Jane spent the past day at Box Hill making up her mind. All of Emma's former unkind feelings towards Jane are washed away by her sympathy, as Emma wishes Jane well with heartfelt warmth.

Emma at last begins to put aside her annoyance for the gossipy Miss Bates, as she fully appreciates her goodness and generosity. Like Harriet, Miss Bates does not begrudge Emma her wrongdoing, and this generosity further humbles Emma.



Miss Bates also shares that Frank left for Richmond on Mrs. Churchill's summons the previous evening. The contrast between Mrs. Churchill's and Jane's situation strikes Emma with particular poignancy, as she reflects on the former's power and the latter's dependence. She leaves the Bateses with sincere good will and regret for her previous unkindness.

Emma also at last puts aside her childish jealousy of Jane, towards whom she feels real female sympathy. She realizes that fate can be both fickle and cruel, endowing the cold Mrs. Churchill with power and leaving the good Jane socially impoverished.



CHAPTER 45

Emma returns home to find Mr. Knightley and Harriet visiting. Mr. Knightley is soon to visit the John Knightleys in London, and he wants to say goodbye. When Mr. Woodhouse mentions Emma's visit to the Bateses, Mr. Knightley perceives Emma's intentions with warm gratification. He takes her hand, in a gesture of uncommon friendliness, and is about to kiss it, but then refrains. They part in perfect amity.

Mr. Knightley's manner of departure puzzles Emma, but she is grateful for their reconciliation. Mr. Knightley, despite his criticism, is also generous and quick to perceive her change of heart. He is greatly moved by her efforts, more than his discretion will allow him to express.



The following day, news arrives of Mrs. Churchill's death. Emma reflects that Frank may now be freed to marry whomever he chooses—even Harriet.

Mrs. Churchill, as a willful and powerful woman, holds the young dependent Frank's fate in her hands.



Emma attempts to rectify her past coldness towards Jane: she invites her to Hartfield, sends her food, and attempts to visit her. Jane pleads ill health, but Emma learns that she has been seen out of bed. Emma realizes with sorrow that Jane is determined to receive no kindness from her, but feels it was worth the effort.

Emma's attempts to demonstrate her good will towards Jane are rejected, causing her some pain and regret. Jane's own motives for her behavior remain somewhat mysterious, though it will be made clear that Jane feels that Emma has played a role in wrecking Jane's engagement to Frank.



CHAPTER 46

About a week after Mrs. Churchill's death, Mr. Weston arrives at Hartfield with an urgent request to take Emma to see Mrs. Weston. At Randalls, an agitated Mrs. Weston informs Emma that Frank and Jane have been secretly engaged since Weymouth. Emma is astonished, torn between mortification at her unflattering conversations with Frank about Jane and her concern for Harriet's feelings for Frank.

The answer to all of the riddles regarding Jane and Frank's behavior finally comes out: their secret engagement. Emma is again completely surprised by the revelation of who is really in love with whom, though her only fault in the affair is her indiscretions regarding Jane.



Emma observes Mrs. Weston's concern for her, and she reassures her that she has had no feelings for Frank for some time. However, Emma strongly disapproves of Frank's behavior. She is angry with him for deceiving and courting her; she also believes he has behaved poorly towards Jane in many regards.

Emma slowly comes over to Mr. Knightley's opinion of Frank as a duplicitous cad, especially as she begins to appreciate the damage he might have done to her and Jane.



Mrs. Weston begs her to postpone judgment until Frank can explain everything by [letter](#). She insists that Frank, too, has suffered from misunderstandings between him and Jane. Upon learning that Jane has accepted a governess position, Frank went frantically to his uncle to plead their case. Mr. Churchill, without the snobbish Mrs. Churchill's influence, consented to give them his blessing, though insisting they postpone the public engagement until more time has passed. Mr. Weston enters the room cautiously, but is soon comforted by Emma's warm congratulations regarding his son's engagement.

As Emma is confronted again with the shortcomings of her perception, she is persuaded to postpone judgment on Frank. It is a lesson of humility that she has been learning throughout the novel, as she reflects on the disastrous consequences of her own vanity-inflated mistakes in judgment on the one hand, and experiences others' generosity towards herself on the other.



CHAPTER 47

Emma's concern for Harriet fuels her anger with Frank and herself. She regrets having again mistakenly encouraged Harriet's affections for a man. She also now understands Jane's recent coldness towards her as motivated by jealousy. Emma is happy for Jane, and generously reflects that Jane will finally attain much deserved social and financial security with marriage.

Emma quickly puts the pieces together, and we see just how much she has grown in her selfless concern towards Harriet and regard for Jane. Despite her anger at the secret engagement, she acknowledges Jane's merits and is happy for her future rise in fortune.



When Harriet arrives at Hartfield, however, it turns out she already knows about the engagement from Mr. Weston and is entirely unperturbed. Emma, surprised, soon discovers that Harriet's interest has been in Mr. Knightley, not Frank, all along. Harriet informs Emma that but for her seeming encouragement, she would never have presumed to raise her eyes to Mr. Knightley. However, now she acknowledges hope of his reciprocal affection.

Harriet's remarkable composure as she relates the true nature of her feelings shows how much she, too, has grown. She is no longer the agitated girl dependent on Emma's opinion to make her own; she perceives Mr. Knightley's merits and believes in her own. She does not ask Emma's permission for the match.



Emma is upset. And from this distress, Emma realizes that she herself is love with Mr. Knightley. Out of a sense of justice to Harriet, she represses her feelings and inquires into the unfolding of Harriet's. Harriet relates several moments in which Mr. Knightley displayed particular affection towards her—including the walk at Donwell—and Emma recalls similarly noting Mr. Knightley's improved opinion of Harriet. Emma can only respond that Mr. Knightley would never intend to lead a woman on.

Emma's forbearance and determination to be fair to her friend, to whom she has done so little real good, does her credit—particularly as it causes her great pain to hear Harriet recount signs of Mr. Knightley's admiration for her. She also corroborates Harriet's evidence with her own observations, showing a less fanciful judgment.



Emma is left to reflect on how very mistaken she has been about everyone: Frank, Jane, Harriet, and herself. She realizes that she has always loved Mr. Knightley; her love for Frank was a delusion. She regrets too her “insufferable vanity” in believing she knew everybody’s heart and could orchestrate their destiny. Now, she has only herself to blame for enabling Harriet and Mr. Knightley—a match that she reflects is not impossible, as the world has been revealed to be an “unequal, inconsistent, incongruous” place.

Emma reflects with horror and wonder upon the potential match between Harriet and Mr. Knightley. It is a match that horrifies her because of their great disparity in social class and wealth, but also inevitably because she is in love with Mr. Knightley. She finds, ironically, that she has become her own worst enemy, because of her blindness and vanity.



CHAPTER 48

Until she is threatened by his loss, Emma never knew how important it was for her to be first in Mr. Knightley’s affection and regard. She realizes that she has taken his attentions for granted, which she now feels were undeserved in the first place. In spite of her new revelations, Emma feels she cannot marry because of her duty to her father.

Mr. Knightley, the only one who criticizes her, is again the impetus for her self-improvement. Emma has experienced few real misfortunes in her life, and it is not until she is faced with the loss of the man she loves that she learns the most about her heart.



Emma feels certain that she would be happy if only Mr. Knightley would remain single all his life, and they could preserve their special friendship. She resolves to carefully observe Harriet and Mr. Knightley in the future.

Emma’s wishes that Mr. Knightley not marry at all remain rather selfish, motivated as they are by her own emotional investment in his affairs. At the same time, it is an un-acted upon wish, marking a change in Emma, who previously would have tried to make the world fit with how she wanted it to be.



Mrs. Weston arrives at Hartfield, having just visited Jane. She relates that Jane has suffered greatly during the concealment of her engagement, and she repents allowing her affection to overpower her judgment in relation to Emma. Jane also expressed gratitude towards Emma for the kindness she displayed during her illness.

Jane’s reserve and coldness towards Emma is finally rendered fully sympathetic and comprehensible—Emma unknowingly caused Jane emotional harm. Jane also displays a generosity and fairness in recognizing Emma’s kindness towards her.



Emma reflects with remorse that her behavior with Frank must have caused Jane considerable distress. As a gloomy evening sets in, she considers what a loss Mr. Knightley’s marriage would cause to Hartfield. Her only consolation is in the hope that all of these desolate events will leave her more rational, self-aware, and a better person.

That Emma anticipates consolation in the hope that, even if she is to lose Mr. Knightley forever, she will at least grow from her mistakes reveals the lasting, good, and humbling impact of Mr. Knightley on Emma’s heart.



CHAPTER 49

Some time later, while Emma takes a reflective walk in the garden, she encounters Mr. Knightley, just returned from London. Concerned from his serious air that he wants to share his feelings about Harriet, Emma directs the topic to Frank and Jane’s secret engagement. Mr. Knightley, however, already knows and has come to comfort her. Emma confesses she never loved Frank and regrets her flirtation with him.

Emma interprets Mr. Knightley’s behavior in light of Harriet’s belief in his reciprocated affection. Mr. Knightley misreads Emma’s agitation as related to Frank, as opposed to himself. Unlike prior misperceptions, this one is inspired not by self-interest, but humility; neither believes they possess their beloved’s heart.



Mr. Knightley begins that he envies Frank, and Emma cuts him short to avoid hearing about Harriet. Mr. Knightley is mortified, and Emma feels bad; she decides she will hear him as a friend. To her great astonishment, Mr. Knightley declares his love for her; she, in turn, confesses hers. Both of them are ecstatic, having gone from believing their beloved attached to another to realizing their beloved is *theirs*. They return from the walk engaged.

The misperception is finally brought to a delightful close, as all of the signs of hesitation turn out to be the result of returned love; ironically, Emma's attempt to silence Mr. Knightley from speaking of Harriet discouraged his declaration of love for her, and had she not decided to selflessly hear him out as a friend he might not have made his feelings known to her.



CHAPTER 50

Emma worries about breaking the news to Mr. Woodhouse and Harriet. Emma decides that she will not marry until her father dies. She then informs Harriet about the situation via [letter](#) and arranges for her to stay with Isabella in London, to heal and ease the awkwardness.

Emma thoughtfully considers how to best behave towards her father and Harriet, both of whom have different reasons for disliking her engagement. She attempts to act as fairly and kindly as possible to each, marking her character.



Mrs. Weston forwards Frank's [letter](#) explaining his behavior and secrecy, which was due to the restrictions of his Churchill relations. He used his courtship of Emma as a cover for his engagement, believing that she was never really interested in him; he also believed she suspected his secret. Jane, however, disapproved of his behavior to Emma, and they quarreled about it at Donwell Abbey. Frank felt Jane was coldly cautious and departed for Richmond.

Frank's behavior, though perhaps not his intentions, is insensitive and blind; he interprets Emma's heart and mind as is convenient to his own interests, even assuming that she is aware of his engagement. His dismissal of Jane's feelings reveals his determination to do—and see—things his own way.



Jane then broke off the engagement by [letter](#), but in the chaos of Mrs. Churchill's death Frank misplaced his reply. Jane then returned all of his letters and requested hers to be returned to her new governess post. Realizing his blunder and the actions that Jane had taken, Frank begged for his uncle's approval of the marriage. Having received it, he then dashed off to Highbury to reconcile with Jane, whom he acknowledges to be much worthier than him, and who has made him happier than he deserves.

Frank, blinded by his own careless confidence, does not see how deeply his behavior has wounded Jane and damaged their relations. When he finally realizes his mistakes, however, Frank demonstrates that he too is capable of taking responsibility and the necessary action to fix the problems he has made. Frank has a good heart, though perhaps a weak will.



CHAPTER 51

Happily in love as she is, Emma finds herself sympathetic to Frank's own blunder-filled love story. The [letter](#) leaves her with a much-improved impression of him, and she shares it with Mr. Knightley.

As someone who has made and been forgiven many blunders herself by her happy situation, Emma finds herself cheerfully extending such generosity to Frank's wrongs against her.



Mr. Knightley, too, softens upon reading Frank's [letter](#), though he still feels Frank's flaws and his unworthiness in comparison to Jane. Mr. Knightley then proposes to move into Hartfield, in order to avoid disturbing Mr. Woodhouse with his daughter's marriage. Emma is moved by such a sacrifice on his part, and she approves the plan. Her only regret is for Harriet, whom she feels has undeservedly suffered.

Mr. Knightley's happy situation in love and new knowledge of Emma's indifference to Frank also renders him more forgiving towards Frank. His plan to move into Hartfield demonstrates his thoughtfulness in considering Mr. Woodhouse's feelings, who now won't have to "lose" another daughter.



CHAPTER 52

Harriet agrees to go to London, as she wishes to consult a dentist. Emma is grateful for the postponement of a painful meeting between the two. She then decides to call on Jane. They do not speak openly of the secret engagement because of Mrs. Elton's presence, but the visit is passed with mutual consciousness, warmth, and feeling. As Jane walks Emma out, they each apologize and establish their good will for the other.

Emma and Jane finally become friends, as each feels she has misbehaved towards the other and is humbled by the other's generosity. In their mutual happiness, they are also full of mutual good will. Emma is finally able to fully and selflessly appreciate Jane's merit, and Jane also seems aware of Emma's kindness.



CHAPTER 53

Mrs. Weston gives birth to a daughter, which Emma has been hoping for. She and Mr. Knightley discuss Emma's own childhood and Mrs. Weston's and Mr. Knightley's roles in raising Emma. Emma reflects that Mr. Knightley's correction countered Mrs. Weston's spoiling, though Mr. Knightley insists she would have done as well without him. However, he considers his devotion to her improvement an early sign of his love for her.

Emma and Mr. Knightley's discussion about her childhood allow the novel to conclude with a reflection on Emma's development. She has come a long way from the spoiled, snobbish mistress of Hartfield. Her marriage to Knightley, a paternal figure, represents her newly developed humility—though whether this enhances her strength as a female heroine is controversial.



Mr. John Knightley congratulates the couple by [letter](#); he anticipated Mr. Knightley's engagement from his behavior in London. Emma anxiously breaks the news of their engagement to her father. Though initially distressed, Mr. Woodhouse eventually accepts it as a settled and even good affair with the help of Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston's persuasion.

Mr. Woodhouse's considerable influence over Emma's life is somewhat disturbing at the close. Though her consideration of his feelings reveals her compassion as a daughter, the restrictions imposed by her father's nerves seem excessively limiting.



Mrs. Weston is delighted by the news, as she regards it to be an equal and mutually meritorious "union of the highest promise of felicity in itself." Word quickly spreads through Highbury, and the engagement is greeted with surprise and general approval by all but the Eltons, who sneer over the fate of "poor Mr. Knightley."

Emma and Mr. Knightley's engagement is applauded as a good match, because they are equals. The importance of their mutual fortune, good lineage and connections in addition to their love for each other results in an ultimately conservative conclusion—an affirmation of class- and character-based affinity as the foundation of a good marriage.



CHAPTER 54

Mr. Knightley arrives with news that Harriet is to marry Mr. Martin. Emma is greatly surprised, given her own knowledge of Harriet's previous feelings, but she is delighted for her friend. Freed from her concern for Harriet's happiness and the need for secrecy with Mr. Knightley, Emma feels that her only wish now is to learn from her previous mistakes and grow more worthy of Mr. Knightley, "whose intentions and judgment had been ever so superior to her own."

Harriet's decision to finally accept Mr. Martin without consulting Emma shows that Harriet has also grown during the course of the novel. She has learned to heal and seek her own happiness independent of Emma's advice. Emma, aware of her wrongs to Harriet, is left with the hope that she too will continue to grow from her errors.



At Randalls, Emma and Frank finally get the opportunity to talk over the recent events. After some initial awkwardness, they congratulate each other and re-establish their former warmth and good will. They both feel they have been luckier than they deserved in their respective matches. When Frank is lively and flippant about the painful past, Jane amusedly rebukes him, and Emma reflects on Mr. Knightley's superiority to Frank.

Frank's lively and light manner may be explained by his happiness in love, but it cannot be completely approved of by Jane or Emma. Emma shares similar flaws with Frank, but her sympathies lie with Jane regarding Frank's behavior. Frank is a bit too unserious, a bit too flippant, a bit too willing to joke away serious matters, to ever truly be an equal to someone like Mr. Knightley.



CHAPTER 55

Harriet returns to Highbury, her behavior fully convincing Emma that Mr. Martin has replaced Mr. Knightley in her affections. Emma greets her with heartfelt congratulations. In the course of Harriet's marriage preparations, she is discovered to have been the illegitimate daughter of a tradesman—an unsuitable match indeed for a gentleman. Emma attends Harriet and Mr. Martin's wedding in September with pleasure, though she feels that their friendship will necessarily and gradually diminish because of their different social stations.

Fueled by the revelation of Harriet's lineage, Emma finally comes to approve the match of Harriet and Mr. Martin, rejoicing in their equality, her friend's financial security, and Mr. Martin's virtues. Sadly, Emma's conviction that their intimacy must diminish given the change in her friend's social circles reveals she still holds to her prioritization of social class.



Jane returns to the Campbells, where she and Frank wait for three months to pass after Mrs. Churchill's death before their wedding in November. Emma and Mr. Knightley hope to marry in October. Mr. Woodhouse's misery threaten these prospects, but when Mrs. Weston's poultry-house is robbed, he comes to welcome the idea of Mr. Knightley in their house as a very good protection. Emma and Mr. Knightley's wedding is absent of finery and parade, to the disdain of Mrs. Elton, but all of their intimate friends witness it with great confidence as to the union's lasting happiness.

Though Jane and Frank are engaged to marry despite some disparity in social situation, the novel devotes the final chapter to the marriages of Harriet and Mr. Martin, and Emma and Mr. Knightley—two matches of equal standing. By focusing on those two marriages at the end of all the messy misperception and blundering, the novel's moral regarding marriages seems to mirror Emma's own feelings and conservatively advocate openness and equality (in both character and class) as the key to a good match.



HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Tam, Stephanie. "Emma." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 2 Oct 2013.
Web. 27 Jun 2017.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Tam, Stephanie. "Emma." LitCharts LLC, October 2, 2013.
Retrieved June 27, 2017. <http://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma>.

To cite any of the quotes from *Emma* covered in the Quotes
section of this LitChart:

MLA

Austen, Jane. *Emma*. Penguin Classics. 2003.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Austen, Jane. *Emma*. New York: Penguin Classics. 2003.

