

EMMA

by Jane Austen



THE AUTHOR

Jane Austen (1775-1817) was the seventh child and second daughter of an Anglican rector in a country parish in Hampshire, England. She had a happy childhood. She read widely, though she had little formal schooling, and she and her siblings delighted in writing and performing plays at home. At the age of twelve, she began to write parodies of popular literary works, and set her hand to her first serious writing project when she was nineteen. That project was an epistolary novel called *Lady Susan* which, while not a work of genius, was good enough to encourage her to keep writing.

Austen's novels evolved through years of writing and rewriting. In 1795, she began a novel called *Elinor and Marianne* that was finally published in 1810 as *Sense and Sensibility*. She started writing *First Impressions* in 1796; it was initially rejected for publication, but later saw print in 1812 as *Pride and Prejudice*. She began work in 1799 on a novel called *Susan* (not to be confused with her initial effort), which was published posthumously in 1818 as *Northanger Abbey*. She wrote three other novels as well - *Mansfield Park* (1813), *Emma* (1815), and *Persuasion* (published posthumously in 1818).

Her personal life was a happy but quiet one, consisting largely of her writing, along with the kind of country amusements - balls, parties, and teas - described in her novels. The family struggled financially between the death of her father in 1805 and the publication of her first novel in 1810. She never married, though in her late twenties she received a proposal from a local aristocrat named Harris Bigg-Wither. She accepted, but changed her mind the next morning. She always maintained a close relationship with her older sister Cassandra, though we know little of her private life, because not only did she guard her privacy very closely, but her family either censored or destroyed almost all of her correspondence after her death.

Jane Austen died in 1817 of what is now believed to have been Addison's disease. She knew she was dying, and raced against time and declining strength to finish *Persuasion*, the novel containing the character considered to be most like Jane herself - the plain but witty Anne Elliot. Her brother Henry arranged for the publication of her last two novels after her death. Only then did people become aware of the author of these popular works of literature - all the novels published during her lifetime had been published anonymously.

Emma (1815) is the longest of Jane Austen's novels, the last to be published during her lifetime, and is generally considered the most complex of the six. While most of her heroines, like Elizabeth Bennet, Elinor Dashwood, and Anne Elliot, are likeable from the very beginning while still growing and changing as the stories progress, Emma Woodhouse is immature, foolish, and well on her way to wrecking the lives of several of those closest to her. As a result, the change she undergoes is greater than that of Austen's other protagonists; her repentance is far greater, more complex, and more meaningful than that of Elizabeth Bennet, for example. The fact that Emma is obsessed with matchmaking also enables Austen to look at marriage in early nineteenth-century England from a different angle from that found in her other novels. The novel is one of the first to make use of a narrative technique known as free indirect discourse, in which the narrator often seems to occupy the mind of the protagonist while at the same time maintaining a critical distance.

PLOT SUMMARY

Chapter 1

The story begins by introducing the title character, Emma Woodhouse, who is almost 21 years of age. She lost her mother when she was too young to remember, and has been raised by an indulgent father and a beloved governess, Miss Taylor. Emma's greatest problem is that, though she is kindhearted and generous, she is spoiled, far too used to getting her own way. The first real sadness that enters Emma's life occurs when Miss Taylor gets married to Mr. Weston. Emma, in fact, had encouraged and promoted the match - something in which she took great satisfaction - but she misses her friend and companion dreadfully. Though she loves her father dearly, he is no real companion for her, either intellectually or emotionally, and is much older than she and set in his ways. His dislike for change causes him to regret the marriages of his elder daughter Isabella and Miss Taylor since both events deprived him of their company. Emma tries to convince her father to visit the Westons, but he continually makes excuses.

George Knightley, the older brother of Isabella's husband John, visits the evening after the wedding and asks about the festivities. Both Mr. Woodhouse and Emma miss the beloved governess, but Emma is consoled by the thought that she was responsible for bringing the two together; she considers herself an accomplished matchmaker. Her father begs her to give up her little hobby, but Emma swears that she cannot help it; she only promises to make no matches for herself. She announces that her next target is Mr. Elton, the new clergyman, who surely must be in need of a wife.

Chapter 2

The author now describes Mr. Weston's first marriage, to a young lady of considerable wealth whose parents did not approve of the match. She loved her husband, but missed the comforts of home and family. She died three years after the wedding, leaving behind a young child who was soon taken in by her parents and assumed the name of Frank Churchill. Captain Weston left the military, entered the business world, and made himself a tidy sum of money. After living as a widower for twenty years, he married Miss Taylor. The relationship between Mr. Weston and Frank is a distant but cordial one; they hardly ever see one another. Soon word arrives that Frank is to pay the newlyweds a visit, and the entire village can talk of nothing else.

Chapter 3

Emma tries as often as possible to arrange for small evening parties to occupy her father's time and attention. The usual guests are the Westons, Mr. George Knightley, Mr. Elton, Mrs. and Miss Bates, and Mrs. Goddard. One evening Mrs. Goddard brings along Harriet Smith, a sweet seventeen-year-old woman of questionable parentage who has grown up in Mrs. Goddard's school. Emma is determined to take her under her wing. Harriet's only friends are the Martins, who rent a farm on Mr. Knightley's estate. Emma believes that such friends are beneath her and that Harriet ought to be helped forward in life. By the time the evening ends, Harriet is overwhelmed by the kind attention she has received from the great Miss Woodhouse.

Chapter 4

Harriet soon becomes a regular visitor to Hartfield, the Woodhouse estate. She and Emma become good friends, often taking long walks together. Emma loves her because she sees in her someone to whom she might become useful. Emma tries and fails to discover the identity of Harriet's parents, of whom Harriet herself is ignorant. Their conversation is taken up almost entirely with Harriet's experiences at school, though she often speaks of her friends the Martins, with whom she had lived for two months. When Emma discovers that Robert Martin is unmarried, she fears for the welfare of her new protegee, who certainly ought to set her sights above the level of a common farmer, but the more Harriet speaks of Mr. Martin, the more enthusiastic she waxes on the subject. Emma, however, tries to discourage any attachment to the man or his family, hoping to find for Harriet a more suitable match. The next day they meet the farmer on their walk and Harriet happily asks Emma's opinion of him. Emma clearly sees him as beneath both herself and Harriet and criticizes his manners, and Harriet, by now completely under Emma's influence, goes along with her assessment. When Emma begins to speak of the fine bearing of men like Mr. Knightley, Mr. Weston, and Mr. Elton, she is sure that Martin must suffer by comparison. By the time their walk is done, she is determined to bring about a match between Harriet and Mr. Elton, the young clergyman.

Chapter 5

Not everyone agrees that the budding friendship between Emma and Harriet is a good thing. Mrs. Weston approves, but George Knightley fears that Harriet will do nothing to curb Emma's tendency to pursue whatever strikes her fancy. Furthermore, she knows nothing and thinks that Emma knows everything, which is the last kind of friendship Emma needs in her life. He also feels that Harriet will suffer because Emma's high ideals will make her uncomfortable with the only kind of life to which her parentage and upbringing suit her. Mrs. Weston then speaks at some length about Emma's perfection of beauty - something that Knightley cannot bring himself to deny. Though Emma has sworn never to marry, Knightley thinks it would do her good to fall in love, especially if she was uncertain that her love was returned. The Westons secretly agree, and think that Knightley himself would make a good candidate for the job.

Chapter 6

Emma is pleased with the progress Harriet is making under her tutelage, and Mr. Elton notices the difference in her. One day Emma suggests that Harriet sit for a portrait, which Emma will be happy to draw, and she enlists Elton to help convince her to do so. Harriet finally agrees, and Elton offers to read to them while Emma paints the watercolor. When the picture is finished, everyone compliments it, and Elton takes it to London to be framed. He is showing increasing signs of attraction to Harriet, and Emma is very pleased with her work.

Chapter 7

On the day of Elton's departure for London, Harriet arrives at Hartfield overflowing with excitement because she has just received a proposal of marriage from Robert Martin. Harriet shows Emma the letter, and, much to Emma's disappointment, the letter is quite well-phrased and even gentlemanly. When Harriet asks Emma for advice, she tells her she must word her refusal graciously. Harriet is still uncertain, and Emma convinces her that, if she is uncertain, she ought to refuse, though she disclaims any intention of telling her what to do. When Harriet, far too easily led, decides to refuse Martin's offer, Emma praises her decision, especially since marriage to Martin would end their relationship because she could never possibly call on a farmer's wife. Harriet asks Emma to help her write her answer, and though Emma insists that it must be Harriet's own words and thoughts, she winds up drafting every sentence. Harriet cannot stop thinking of poor Mr. Martin, even when Emma tries to distract her with talk of Mr. Elton and her picture in London.

Chapter 8

As time passes, Harriet spends more and more time at Hartfield. One day when Harriet is elsewhere, George Knightley visits Hartfield and compliments Emma on the ways in which she has helped Harriet to improve herself. He tells her that he believes Harriet will soon receive a proposal from Robert Martin - a development of which he heartily approves, having a great respect for Martin and having advised him to pursue his interest. When Emma tells him that Harriet refused Martin's offer, Knightley is incredulous and declares that Harriet is a great fool for having done so. He strongly suspects that Emma influenced her friend's decision, and Emma admits having done so, arguing that Harriet is above a mere farmer in social standing. Knightley responds that Martin is far above Harriet, who can boast no advantages of family, education, money, or talents; in fact, he would have advised his friend against such a disadvantageous match were he not so obviously head over heels in love. Finally, he angrily insists that Emma has been no help to Harriet by giving her airs above her standing in life. He is afraid she will find herself in a position where everyone within her reach is considered beneath her dignity. Knightley also suspects that Emma is trying to match Harriet with Elton, but he warns her that such an endeavor is hopeless because Elton knows the value of marrying well and will never seek a wife with no family or prospects. In order to avoid quarreling further, Knightley departs, leaving Emma a little less certain of the rightness of her ideas than she had been before.

Chapter 9

Emma is sorry about Knightley's displeasure, but is not sorry about what she has done. The picture of Harriet is hung over the mantelpiece and is greatly admired by Elton, who seems increasingly the object of Harriet's affections. The plan to improve Harriet's learning is not going very well, however, because Emma seems unable to persevere in it. The only task Harriet gives herself to is a collection of riddles. Emma encourages Elton to contribute to their project, and he finally comes up with one, supposedly written by a friend of his, the answer to which is "courtship." Harriet is unable to solve the riddle, but Emma is convinced by it that he intends to court Harriet. She explains the riddle to Harriet and congratulates her on her coming good fortune. Contrary to Elton's wishes, Emma writes it in Harriet's book. When Elton sees it there, he is both pleased and somewhat sheepish.

Chapter 10

One day in December, Emma and Harriet take a walk to visit a poor family in the parish. On the way, they pass the vicarage, and Emma tells Harriet that she will soon be moving there, and she will visit her often. As they walk, Harriet asks Emma why she has never married, and Emma responds that she probably never will do so; she has no fear of becoming an old maid as long as she has fortune and an important place in society, and she expects to be well-occupied caring for her nieces and nephews. On the way back from visiting the sick and impoverished family, they encounter Elton, who is on his way to call on them. Emma tries to leave Elton and Harriet alone together, but with little success. Finally she breaks a lace on her boot deliberately and asks Elton if they may stop at the vicarage to make the necessary repairs - an idea that pleases him greatly. Emma takes longer than necessary with the housekeeper working on her boot, hoping that Elton will propose to Harriet in her absence, but nothing happens. Nonetheless, Emma is convinced that her scheme is progressing, albeit slowly.

Chapter 11

Soon John and Isabella arrive for a ten-day visit with their children. This keeps Emma occupied so that she is able to give no serious attention to forwarding her matchmaking scheme. The conversation following their arrival centers on the departure of Miss Taylor to marry Weston, their frequent visits to Hartfield, and the expected arrival of Frank Churchill to meet his new stepmother.

Chapter 12

That night, Emma invites George Knightley to dinner, hoping to put their quarrel behind them. They immediately return to their earlier discussion, however, with neither one willing to admit to being in the wrong. Most of the rest of the evening is occupied with conversation about matters of business between the Knightley brothers while Mr. Woodhouse and Isabella talk about the potential health dangers that surround them on all sides. Emma tries to steer the conversation away from health issues whenever they come up, and they go on to discuss friends and acquaintances. When Mr. Woodhouse begins to criticize Isabella's vacation trip, claiming it to have been unhealthy and putting his own words in the mouth of his doctor, John can tolerate no more and tells him to mind his own business, after which George quickly changes the subject.

Chapter 13

The visit of Isabella and her family goes very well for all concerned. On Christmas Eve they plan to dine at Randalls with the Westons, and George, Harriet, and Elton are invited to join the party. Harriet, however, falls ill and is unable to come. When Emma meets Elton on her way home from visiting Harriet, he expresses concern that her illness might be contagious. Emma, hoping to talk him into spending the evening with Harriet, tells him that, as a precaution, he should skip the dinner party and take care of himself. He declines, however, when he is offered a place in John Knightley's carriage. Emma is shocked that he seems to have no desire to sit with Harriet in her illness and chooses to dine out instead. After Elton leaves, John suggests to Emma that she is the true object of his affections, which she vehemently denies. On the way to dinner, John complains about being dragged out in the snow for a boring evening, but when they pick up Elton, he is all affability and good cheer, not seeming to care very much about poor Harriet's condition.

Chapter 14

Emma more than anything else looks forward to spending time with her former governess. At dinner, however, she is seated next to Elton, who constantly pays her the most solicitous attention, enough so that she begins to wonder if John's suspicion might not be true. Weston soon begins talking about his son Frank Churchill, who is to visit soon. Emma has never met him, but for some reason finds him fascinating. Weston tells her that he plans to visit in the middle of January if his aunt and uncle, the Churchills, who raised him and with whom he lives, will permit it.

Chapter 15

After dinner, Elton migrates in Emma's direction and asks her about Harriet's condition, but she soon realizes his chief concern is that she not catch Harriet's cold by hazarding a visit to the sickroom. Snow continues to fall, and the party breaks up because its nervous members fear becoming snowbound even though the accumulation is only half an inch. On the trip home Emma and Elton are alone in one of the carriages. No sooner do the carriages leave the drive than Elton passionately professes his love for Emma and asks for her hand in marriage. When she asks him about Harriet, he insists that any regard he showed toward her was only because she was Emma's friend. He angrily accuses her of encouraging him, which she vehemently denies, and tells her that he could never be interested in someone so far beneath him socially as Harriet.

Chapter 16

When Emma gets home, she sits in her room, miserable about her misperception and the damage it was likely to do to poor Harriet. She realizes that she has interpreted everything Elton did in the light of her own desires about a relationship between him and her young friend. She thinks back to the warnings she received from George Knightley about Elton's ambitions and from his brother John about his interest in her and realizes that they were far more perceptive than she. She has no concern for Elton, recognizing that he does not really love her, but merely seeks a rich wife, and resents the fact that he should look so far above himself as to desire an alliance with such a family as hers. In the end, though, Emma realizes that the fault is hers for engaging in matchmaking

in the first place. Her next concern is for Harriet and the awkward conversation that must come to pass; she is convinced that she was right in discouraging the relationship with Robert Martin, but regrets her interference in the matter of Mr. Elton. When she wakes up in the morning, she finds herself snowbound and thus able to put off the conversation with Harriet for several weeks.

Chapter 17

When the weather clears, John and Isabella take their leave. That morning, Mr. Woodhouse receives a rather perfunctory letter from Elton indicating that he intends to spend some time in Bath and will be unable to call on them. The next day Emma, unable to put it off any longer, goes to see Harriet and confess all to her. Harriet takes it surprisingly well, convinced that she is unworthy of such a match in any case and grateful to Emma for thinking so well of her as to promote it. Emma, on the other hand, is thoroughly ashamed of herself and begins to think Harriet's character superior to her own. She determines to do all she can to soothe and heal Harriet's wounded spirit.

Chapter 18

The middle of January arrives and Frank Churchill does not; his aunt refuses to release him for even a brief visit to the Westons. Emma communicates the news to Mr. Knightley, who argues that if the young man really wanted to come, he would find the means to do so; that he has not simply indicates that he is proud, selfish, and pleasure-seeking like the relations who brought him up, and weak in the bargain. Emma tries to defend him and declares that he will be welcome in their town of Highbury, but fails to convince Knightley of the young man's virtue.

Chapter 19

One day Emma and Harriet are walking together, and Harriet continues to bring up her favorite subject of conversation - Mr. Elton. In order to put the former love out of her mind, she decides that they should visit Mrs. and Miss Bates, among the poorer denizens of Highbury. Miss Bates is thankful for their visit and quickly launches into all the local gossip, including references to Mr. Elton and her niece, Jane Fairfax, who intends to visit them the following week and stay for three or four months.

Chapter 20

Jane Fairfax is the daughter of Miss Bates' sister who was orphaned as a child when her father died in battle and her mother succumbed to consumption. Her father's commanding officer, Colonel Campbell, took her in and saw that she was educated for the teaching profession. The Campbells grew to love her and were reluctant to part with her when she completed her education. When the Campbells vacation in Ireland, Jane visits her relations in Highbury, after which she intends to begin her career as a governess. Emma, for reasons she herself does not understand, dislikes the lovely, sweet, and accomplished orphan. When Jane arrives, Emma, seeing her for the first time in two years, is impressed with her elegance and determined to dislike her no longer. In fact, the main thing she regrets after her first visit is that she can think of no young man with whom to match her. Soon she reverts to her earlier attitude, however, largely due to the boring company of Miss Bates and Jane's reserve, which Emma finds frustrating, especially when she finds that Jane

is acquainted with Frank Churchill and she is unable to extract any information from her about the young man.

Chapter 21

Knightsley, missing Emma's undercurrent of dislike, commends her for her treatment of Jane and her relations. When Miss Bates and Jane return the next day, they bring news that Elton, after a mere four weeks' acquaintance, is engaged to marry a certain Miss Hawkins, the daughter of a wealthy Bristol merchant he met in Bath. After a time of gossip dominated by Miss Bates, the visitors take their leave. Soon Harriet arrives, bursting with news. Emma expects her to talk of Elton's impending marriage, but instead she tells her that she ran into Robert Martin and his sister in the local haberdashery on the way to Hartfield, and that they both had treated her kindly, though with a certain reserve. Emma, still blind with regard to Robert Martin, assures Harriet that she will likely encounter him only rarely in the future.

Chapter 22

When Mr. Elton returns to Highbury, he is a changed man, having forgotten Emma Woodhouse and able to speak of nothing but Augusta Hawkins and her beauty, talents, and substantial fortune. Emma by now realizes how vain and shallow Elton is, and has no real desire to see him in the future. She at this point is largely concerned for Harriet, who vacillates between preoccupation with Mr. Elton and thinking about the Martins. When Elizabeth Martin, Robert's sister, again reaches out to her, she feels obliged to return the visit, but Emma advises her to be purely formal so as not to encourage further intercourse.

Chapter 23

When Harriet visits the Martins, Emma is careful to retrieve her after no more than fifteen minutes lest any connection be strengthened. When she hears about the visit, however, she regrets that the Martins are not of a better social class so she could justify allowing Harriet to pursue the acquaintance. On the way home they meet the Westons, who tell them that Frank Churchill is due to arrive for a two-week visit the following day. Emma is excited enough to put everything else out of her mind, and spends the next morning pacing and fidgeting in expectation of Frank's arrival. He appears hours earlier than expected, and Emma's first impression is everything she hoped for; she is convinced at first glance that she will like him very much. She likes him very much indeed, and within a few hours perceives that Mr. Weston entertains thoughts of a match between the two attractive young people. As they take their leave, Frank indicates his intention to pay a visit to Jane Fairfax in Highbury.

Chapter 24

The next morning Frank visits Hartfield again in the company of Mrs. Weston. Emma continues to be impressed by his manner. As the walk through Highbury, Frank sees the decrepit Crown Inn, which formerly was used for dancing, and asks Emma why the practice had never been revived; he thinks that they should plan to have balls at least every fortnight. Emma asks Frank about his visit to Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax, and he replies that he found the aunt talkative and the

niece sickly and reserved, at which point Emma leaps to her defense, but later admits that she has been unable to penetrate Jane's reserve and has no desire for intimacy unless she is able to do so. By the time the promenade is completed, Emma decides that Frank is a much better person than she had originally been led to believe.

Chapter 25

Emma begins to question her judgment the next day when Frank decides on a whim to go to London, sixteen miles away, merely to have his hair cut, but is mollified when she finds that the Westons uniformly speak well of their new guest. In fact, the only man in Highbury who does not think well of Frank Churchill is George Knightley, who finds him "a trifling, silly fellow." About this time a businessman in Highbury named Cole, who has become very prosperous, decides that he and his wife should begin to arrange parties for their neighbors. Emma, viewing anyone engaged in trade as beneath her, is determined to reject their invitation, but is shocked when everyone among her acquaintance is invited while she and her father are not. Shortly thereafter their invitation arrives, delayed because the Coles wished to make special arrangements for her father's comfort. Seeing their consideration, she decides to attend the party after all, though her father prefers to stay home.

Chapter 26

Frank returns from London, blissfully unaware of the inconvenience he may have caused to others. Emma by this time is making excuses for him in her mind. Soon the day arrives for the party at the Cole residence. Emma is pleased to find that she is seated next to Frank Churchill at dinner, and the two converse without awkwardness. Emma then overhears Mrs. Cole telling her neighbor that Jane Fairfax has just received a lovely pianoforte from an anonymous benefactor, though all assume Colonel Campbell to be the responsible party. Emma and Frank continue to speculate about the identity of the donor. Could it have been Mr. Dixon, whose wife is the daughter of Colonel Campbell and Jane's best friend? Local gossip suggests that Mr. Dixon, who once saved Jane from falling off a boat and drowning, really prefers her to his wife, and Emma has the audacity to spread this rumor. When Jane arrives at the party, all the ladies begin to question her about her marvelous gift. Later in the evening, Mrs. Weston tells Emma that Miss Bates and her niece had been brought to the party in Mr. Knightley's carriage and were to return home the same way. Emma is not surprised at this, knowing Knightley's generous and compassionate spirit, but Mrs. Weston suspects a budding romance between Knightley and Jane, guessing that her new instrument came from him. Emma refuses to believe it and ironically accuses her former governess of matchmaking. When the time arrives for the evening's entertainment, Emma is asked to play and sing and, much to her surprise, Frank joins her in a few duets. Then Jane Fairfax takes her turn, and Emma has to admit that Jane's talent is far superior to her own. Frank joins her as well. Jane's voice tires, but Frank wants to sing some more, apparently caring little for Jane's health and strength. Knightley puts a stop to it and the dancing begins, with Emma being taken onto the floor by Frank, who compliments her liveliness and speaks unfavorably of Jane's dancing by comparison.

Chapter 27

Emma enjoys the party far more than she had imagined possible and is glad she decided to go. She is, however, embarrassed that her own playing and singing was so inferior to that of Jane Fairfax, so the next day she practices for an hour and a half. Soon Harriet arrives and compliments her playing so lavishly as to make her lack of discernment painfully obvious. She soon turns the conversation to Robert Martin, who dined recently with relations of the Coles, who spoke very highly of him. When Emma accompanies Harriet to Highbury for some shopping, they meet Mrs. Weston and Frank, who are on their way to the Bates home to see the new pianoforte. In a few minutes Emma and Harriet are invited to join them. On the way, Miss Bates babbles on and on about anything and everything, in the process letting Emma know that Mr. Knightley had sent a bushel of apples to them when he found that their supply was almost gone and that Jane liked them.

Chapter 28

When they arrive at the home of Mrs. Bates, Frank insists on sitting by Emma. Jane is nervous at first, but soon is doing justice to her new instrument. Frank speaks openly of Colonel Campbell as the giver of the lovely gift while hinting at something else, but this embarrasses both Emma, who had shared her speculation about Dixon with him, and Jane, who insists she has no knowledge of her benefactor. Soon Knightley stops by the window and asks after Jane's health.

Chapter 29

Frank enjoyed the dancing at the Coles so much that he and Mrs. Weston plan to continue it at Randalls as soon as possible. They soon realize that the rooms at Randalls are too small for the purpose, and Frank proposes renovating the Crown Inn, which had many years earlier been used for dancing. The Westons, Frank, Emma and her father, Miss Bates, and Jane examine the Crown and declare it suitable for the purpose, and before they leave, Frank commits Emma for the first two dances.

Chapter 30

As plans are made for the ball, Emma fears that Frank will have to leave before they can be brought to fruition. Her fears are groundless, as the Churchills reluctantly allow him to extend his stay. Her next concern is the fact that Knightley has no interest in the project; he insists that he would rather stay at home and do the estate accounts. Unfortunately, Frank soon receives a letter from the Churchills insisting that he return home immediately because his aunt is unwell. He has no idea when he may be able to return to the area, and he says a regretful farewell to his new friends. When he draws Emma aside, she is convinced he is about to propose, but they are interrupted by Mr. Weston. He leaves, and plans for the ball are set aside forthwith. Emma is so disconsolate that she considers the possibility that she might be in love with Frank Churchill.

Chapter 31

Every day in the weeks that follow, Emma thinks of Frank Churchill, but her imagined conversations always end with her refusing his offer of marriage. She thus concludes that she must

not really be in love with him after all. As far as she is concerned, their brief relationship only confirms her determination to remain unmarried, and her somewhat shallow emotional attachment she thinks of as a sort of vaccination [not that she would think in such terms in 1815] to prevent her falling in love in the future. She even fleetingly considers the possibility of matching up Frank and Harriet, but quickly dismisses it from her mind. She is now reminded of the coming nuptials of Elton and Miss Hawkins, and their probable impact on Harriet's frame of mind. Harriet is distraught about the wedding and can talk of nothing else, but Emma finally silences her by begging her not to remind her perpetually of her own folly in leading Harriet to entrust her heart to Mr. Elton.

Chapter 32

After the wedding, Emma and Harriet call on the new young couple. Needless to say, the visit is awkward at best. Afterwards, Harriet announces that she is now able to be in Elton's presence without fear. When Mrs. Elton returns Emma's call, Emma observes her more closely and decides that she is vain, ignorant, and one to put on airs. Mrs. Elton spends the entire time talking about herself and her former home. Emma has to bite her tongue to keep from responding rudely to the woman's incessant chatter about her social standing and advantages. By the time she leaves, Emma is convinced that she is insufferably vulgar.

Chapter 33

Emma's impression of Mrs. Elton does not improve over time. Elton, unsurprisingly, is uncommonly proud of her and boasts of her to all who will listen. Meanwhile, both become abusive toward Emma and contemptuous of Harriet. Mrs. Elton does, however, make an immediate attempt to befriend Jane Fairfax and advance her standing in society. By the time the woman is finished praising Jane to Emma, the latter feels sorry for the poor girl, whom she has never liked in the first place. Much to her surprise, Jane seems to welcome Mrs. Elton's attentions. When the Campbells invite Jane to join them in Ireland, she declines, preferring to remain in Highbury, for no good reason that Emma can possibly imagine. One day Emma, while visiting with the Westons and Mr. Knightley, is discussing Jane Fairfax and her relationship with the Eltons. Knightley openly expresses his regard for Jane, and Emma hints that his feelings might go deeper than regard. Knightley, however, openly affirms that he could never marry Jane, and that she would refuse him if he were to ask her. After Knightley leaves, Mrs. Weston suggests to Emma that the man may protest too much.

Chapter 34

Everyone in Highbury seems to want to host the newlyweds. Mrs. Elton is impressed with their reception while at the same time looking down her nose at the inferior nature of their homes and provisions. She fully intends to throw a large party in the spring to show all of them how such things ought to be done. Emma, not wishing to be left out, plans a dinner and invites the Westons, Mr. Knightley, and Jane Fairfax; Harriet graciously and understandably declined to be part of the company. In the end, John Knightley wound up taking the place of Mr. Weston. Talk turns to the fact that Jane had walked to the post office in the rain that morning, and immediately several of the company criticize her for doing so. Mrs. Elton offers to have her servant pick up her mail for her each morning and bring it to her, but Jane declines the offer, preferring her morning walk. Mrs.

Elton, however, steamrolls right over her and insists that the matter is settled. As the conversation progresses, Emma begins to perceive that the mail she is so anxious to receive must be coming from Frank Churchill.

Chapter 35

After dinner, Mrs. Elton continues to monopolize Jane, pressing her, not only about the post office, but also about finding a situation for her as soon as possible, which Mrs. Elton determines to do. Jane begs her not to trouble herself, insisting that she does not intend to seek a place for several months yet, but Mrs. Elton does not give way easily. Soon Mr. Weston arrives and presents a letter to his wife from Frank Churchill, announcing his intention of returning within the next two days in the company of his aunt and uncle.

Chapter 36

Weston and Mrs. Elton discuss the coming visit of Frank and the Churchills, and Weston makes no secret of his dislike for Frank's aunt and uncle. Meanwhile, John Knightley announces his departure and leaves his two oldest boys in Emma's care.

Chapter 37

As Emma ponders the impending arrival of Frank Churchill, she knows that any affection she might have felt has died, but worries that he may still entertain feelings for her. Her greatest fear is that he will make a proposal of marriage to her. His first and only visit to Hartfield assuages her fears, as he only stays for fifteen minutes and is open and friendly, but nothing more. After ten days the Churchills leave for Richmond, which is still close enough for Frank to visit. Soon they are reviving plans for the ball at the Crown Inn.

Chapter 38

Soon the day for the ball arrives. As more and more people enter the inn, Frank becomes increasingly restless. He seems anxious for the arrival of the Eltons, whom he has never met, but this doesn't stop Mrs. Elton from overwhelming him with her conversation. They are to bring Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax in their carriage. They forget to do so, but the oversight is quickly remedied. Miss Bates enters talking, and doesn't come up for air for many minutes. When Emma gets Frank by himself, she finds that his opinion of Mrs. Elton is much like her own. Even though Emma planned the entire ball, Mrs. Elton is given pride of place in the first dance. When Mrs. Weston suggests that Frank ought to dance with her, he insists that he is already committed to Emma for the first two dances. Emma's main concern is that Knightley refuses to dance, merely standing on the sidelines with the older men. Near the end of the ball, Harriet is without a partner, but Elton, who is standing nearby, deliberately snubs her, which infuriates Emma, though Elton and his wife find it quite humorous. The next thing Emma sees is Knightley stepping forward to escort Harriet onto the dance floor. After dinner, Emma and Knightley share their disgust with the behavior of the Eltons, then share the last dance together.

Chapter 39

The next morning Emma is still happily recalling her conversation with Knightley and the ensuing dance. Soon, however, Frank Churchill arrives with Harriet on his arm. She is clearly distraught, and when she enters the house she promptly collapses into a chair and faints. When she revives, she explains that she was accosted by gypsies along the road demanding money, but had been rescued by Churchill. Was this romantic rescue intended providentially to throw these two young people together? Emma, not surprisingly, begins to think such thoughts, though she is determined not to interfere; her “scheme” would remain passive. The news of the encounter spreads rapidly throughout the village, and soon the gypsies move on to more congenial grounds.

Chapter 40

A few days later Harriet visits Emma, solemnly bearing a small box. She swears that she has gotten over Elton once and for all, and to probe it intends to burn her keepsakes of his. She opens the box, revealing a tiny piece of sticking plaster and a pencil stub. On her next visit, Harriet blurts out to Emma that she intends never to marry. Emma discerns that she says this because she feels herself inferior in station to the man she admires, and Harriet confirms that this is true. Emma, of course, thinks she has Frank Churchill in mind, but the “great service” for which Harriet is so grateful is something other than rescue from gypsies. Emma warns her to be cautious in order to avoid anything close to the previous disaster.

Chapter 41

Summer arrives and little changes in Highbury. Knightley, who had never liked Frank Churchill, comes to dislike him even more because he suspects that the attentions he is paying to Emma have some ulterior motive, and that motive might have something to do with Jane Fairfax. During a word game that night, the two appear to be covertly communicating certain secrets, but when Knightley asks Emma if she has seen signs of affection between the two, she firmly denies it.

Chapter 42

Mrs. Elton had long been boasting of her relatives and anticipating their visit to Highbury, but the much-expected event is again delayed. In fact, the only news of import that keeps tongues wagging during the summer is the pregnancy of Mrs. Weston. Mrs. Elton decides to make up for her disappointment by hosting a grand picnic at nearby Box Hill. When word spreads about this, Emma and Mrs. Weston decide to plan a smaller picnic of their own, but, much to their displeasure, Mr. Weston suggests that the two outings be combined and Mrs. Elton readily agrees. When a carriage horse comes up lame, making the trip to Box Hill impossible, Knightley casually suggests that his estate at Donwell Abbey might do as well. Mrs. Elton immediately steps in to take charge, insisting on sending out the invitations, but Knightley will not hear of it. While arrangements are being made, the horse recovers, so the picnic at Box Hill is planned for the day after the outing at Donwell. When the day for the outing arrives, most of the guests go into the garden to pick strawberries while Emma reacquaints herself with the house and grounds of her dear friend. After the strawberries are picked, Mrs. Elton happily informs Jane that she has found a suitable place for her to serve as governess despite Jane’s repeated requests that she not undertake such a

responsibility. Jane denies any interest in the post, but Mrs. Elton will not be put off and insists on writing that very day. As the others explore the grounds, Emma returns to the house to check on her father. There she meets Jane, who is clearly exhausted from being subjected to the tender mercies of Mrs. Elton. She intends to leave and walk back home, and asks Emma to tell the others she has gone when they miss her. The outing is almost over by the time Frank arrives. He is exhausted from caring for the needs of his demanding aunt and wishes himself out of England as soon as possible. Emma, however, convinces him to join them the following day at Box Hill.

Chapter 43

The next day dawns bright and sunny as the party makes their way to Box Hill, seven miles distant. Emma immediately notices a lack of harmony in the group, though she is at a loss to explain it. When they finally sit down together, Frank suddenly becomes more lively, especially in the attentions he is paying to Emma. She, on the other hand, much preferred that he flirt with Harriet. When Frank realizes that he and Emma are the only ones talking, he demands that the others share what they are thinking. A few respond humorously, Miss Bates speaks at great length, and finally Knightley wonders whether hearing what people are thinking is really such a good idea. Frank then changes his request - he wants each member of the party to say "one thing very clever, two things moderately clever, or three things very dull indeed" for the entertainment of all. Miss Bates immediately responds that saying three dull things will not be hard for her, and Emma rudely asks her if she is able to restrict herself to three, which quickly silences the poor old maid. Weston tries to cover the embarrassment with a bad joke, but the Eltons refuse to participate and soon stalk off, to the relief of everyone else. Frank tries to laugh off the discomfort by saying that he will only marry someone chosen for him by Emma; he will go abroad for two years and expect her to have a wife waiting for him when he returns. She, of course, thinks immediately of Harriet. As the party breaks up, Knightley pulls Emma aside and rebukes her for her thoughtless comment to Miss Bates. Emma knows that she is the kindest, gentlest, most harmless person in the world despite her foibles, and is very sorry for the hurt she has caused. Before she can respond to Knightley's chastisement, he has turned away. She cries silently all the way home.

Chapter 44

The next morning finds Emma still miserable, and determined to make amends by visiting Miss Bates forthwith. She arrives to find Jane indisposed; apparently she is preparing to take a post as governess that she has no desire to fill because of the tender mercies of Mrs. Elton. She is in her room writing letters to the Campbells and Mrs. Dixon informing them of the fact. With this news, Emma feels more sympathy for Jane than she has ever felt in her life before, especially when she finds, to her great surprise, that Jane had asked Mrs. Elton to send her acceptance. She is to leave within a fortnight. Miss Bates wonders what is to happen to the pianoforte, especially since the giver remains unknown. This causes Emma to think again of all her unjust conjectures, and she leaves with sincere good wishes.

Chapter 45

When Emma gets home, she finds Knightley and Harriet waiting for her. Knightley tells her that he is on his way to London to visit his brother and the family. His manner is cool and distant,

but when he hears that Emma has just returned from visiting Miss Bates, he smiles warmly and knowingly. He takes her hand and is on the point of kissing it when he lets go and quickly departs. The next day word arrives of the death of Mrs. Churchill; for once her pleas of illness had been justified. For the first time in many years she is spoken of with compassion. One consequence of this unexpected event is that Frank is finally free of his aunt's tyranny. To Emma, this means he is free to pursue Harriet, while most others expect him to pursue Emma. Emma decides to invite Jane to spend the day with her, but Jane declines, complaining of a severe headache. Emma tries twice more and twice is rebuffed. She begins to think that Jane is avoiding her in particular, but is consoled by thinking that Knightley would approve of her actions.

Chapter 46

Ten days after Mrs. Churchill dies, Weston appears at Emma's door and asks her to come see his wife immediately, but without telling her father. Emma, fearing that something horrible has happened, allows her imagination to run wild while she walks to Randalls. When she gets there, Mrs. Weston informs her that Frank Churchill has for a long time been secretly engaged to Jane Fairfax, and that the two have run off together. She is furious at Frank's duplicity and fears that Emma will be badly hurt. Emma, however, assures her that she has had no interest in Frank for months, and the news causes her no personal sorrow whatever. Before she leaves, she congratulates Mr. Weston on having acquired such a lovely and accomplished daughter-in-law.

Chapter 47

Emma now understands Jane's coldness toward her, but at this point her main concern is for Harriet, who once again had been encouraged to place her hopes on the wrong man. She dreads having to break the news to her. When Harriet arrives, however, she is bubbling over with excitement, having just heard the news from Mr. Weston. Emma is confused; she is certain that Harriet was romantically interested in Frank. Harriet assures that such was never the case; in fact, the man whose kindness had attracted her attention was none other than Mr. Knightley, who had danced with her at the ball when everyone else had been so rude. Emma asks her if she has any indication that her affection is returned, and Harriet answers in the affirmative. In a manner so sudden that it amazes her, Emma is filled with jealousy and determines that Knightley should marry no one but herself. Suddenly the full import of her unpardonable behavior toward Harriet descends upon her. She then listens patiently while Harriet narrates all the small kindnesses shown her by Mr. Knightley. At one point he even drew her aside and asked if her affections were engaged. Emma wonders if he might have been thinking of Robert Martin, but Harriet denies that such a thing is possible. By the time Harriet leaves, Emma devoutly wishes that she had never met the girl. Everywhere she turns, she sees problems that are, either directly or indirectly, her own fault. She spends the rest of the day examining her heart, deploring her folly and self-deception, and concluding that the only true feeling left to her is her affection for Knightley. She even deeply regrets turning Harriet's affection away from that honest farmer, Robert Martin.

Chapter 48

Emma's eyes are now open to exactly how important Knightley's esteem for her has always been and how much she has taken it for granted. She has always been his favorite, and she can't

stand the thought of losing that privilege. She cannot believe that he would stoop to marry Harriet. In fact, she convinces herself that she could be happy if he never married at all, as long as their relationship remained the same. Besides, she could not believe that anyone who would so sternly confront her about her faults could truly be in love with her. While Emma is exercising her mind with these matters, Mrs. Weston arrives to tell her about her visit to Jane Fairfax. Jane was truly sorry for what she had done and thoroughly ashamed of herself, and assured Mrs. Weston that hiding her relationship with Frank had caused her nothing but pain. She is particularly grieved by the effect the entire affair had on Emma. This only piles more hot coals on Emma's head, as she recalls her resentment and lack of kindness toward Jane when she first arrived. As the evening passes, her imagination leaps forward to a time, perhaps not far distant, when all of her friends will be lost to her and she will be left alone with her father.

Chapter 49

The stormy weather suits Emma's mood, but as soon as the storm passes, she must be out of doors. As she walks in the garden, she sees Knightley, whom she believed still to be in London, approaching. She decides to avoid the matter most on her mind by telling him about Frank and Jane, but he already knows of their engagement and is angry with Frank for being such a scoundrel, though he feels sorry for Jane, who deserves much better. He is relieved, however, to find that Emma is not wounded by Frank's behavior and was never really attached to him. The only thing for which Knightley can praise Frank is his willingness to commit himself to a woman with no fortune for the sake of love, for which Knightley envies him. At this point Emma is convinced that he is prepared to tell her about his love for Harriet, and she tries to forestall him. Finally she realizes that such behavior is beneath her and she begs him to continue. To her astonishment, he then offers her a proposal of marriage, which she gladly accepts. What she does not know is that he did not determine to propose to her until that very moment when she assured him she had never been attached to Frank Churchill.

Chapter 50

When Emma comes inside for dinner, she is floating in the clouds and finds it very difficult indeed to keep from her father what she suspects will be very painful to him. She determines then and there never to leave her father as long as he lives. But what is she to say to Harriet? She decides to arrange for Isabella to invite her to London for a visit and prepares to write a letter to that effect. Before she can do so, she receives a letter from Frank Churchill. In it he not only begs for forgiveness, but explains that the fault was all on his side, absolves Jane of all blame, admits sending the pianoforte, and tells her that Jane had actually broken off the engagement and accepted the governess offer because of his unacceptable behavior. Within a few days they reconciled, and now plans are moving smoothly ahead for their union.

Chapter 51

After reading the letter, Emma is fully prepared to forgive Frank and wish him every happiness. She then shows it to Knightley, who, though still critical of Frank's behavior, softens somewhat in the reading. They then turn to the problem of what to do with Mr. Woodhouse after they marry. To separate Emma from her father is as unthinkable as to separate him from Hartfield.

The only practical solution is for the newlyweds to live at Hartfield as long as Mr. Woodhouse is alive, and then move to Donwell Abbey. At first Emma worries about the inconvenience this will create for Knightley, but he assures her that he can bear it as long as necessary, and she finally agrees. But what is to be done about poor Harriet?

Chapter 52

The immediate solution is for Harriet to visit Isabella and her family. This is easily arranged. A larger problem now looms - how to break the news to her father. She decides to wait until Mrs. Weston's baby is born in order to avoid subjecting him to too much excitement at once. In the meantime, Emma pays a visit to Jane Fairfax. She finds her a changed woman - healthy, happy, and brimming over with excitement. She must suppress her excitement, however, because Mrs. Elton is also in the house. Emma expects her to be upset, but finds that she is happy because she believes herself privy to a secret unknown to others. Once they make their escape, Emma and Jane frankly forgive each other and look forward to the time when they can display their friendship more openly, though ultimately Jane will leave to be with her new husband in the home of his uncle.

Chapter 53

In due time, Mrs. Weston gives birth to a little girl to whom she gives the name Anna. Emma is convinced that, having been a governess, she will do a wonderful job of educating her daughter, while Knightley maintains that she will spoil her even worse than she did Emma. He finds, however, that his attitude toward spoiled little girls has altered somewhat, seeing what his favorite has become. She gives him credit for the improvement in her, but he claims that all his attention did was to make him fall in love with her when she was thirteen. She promises to continue to call him Mr. Knightley with one exception - when they stand together before the altar. Meanwhile, Harriet is doing well in London with Isabella's family. At this point Emma considers the time right to break the news to her father. She does so as gently as possible. Initially he objects, reminding her that she had sworn never to marry, but finally he relents after much persuasion and encouragement from Isabella, Mrs. Weston, and Knightley himself. Soon everyone knows, and all rejoice with the exception of Mrs. Elton, who swears that Knightley had made a serious and regrettable error that would, unfortunately, exclude him from their company.

Chapter 54

Ever since their engagement, Emma and Knightley have avoided talking about Harriet Smith. Soon Knightley arrives with what he thinks Emma will find to be distressing news - that she is engaged to Robert Martin. Emma, of course, is delighted that all her errors in her dealings with Harriet have now been corrected. Knightley engineered the whole thing (he spent so much time getting to know Harriet earlier to ensure that the match was a good one for his friend Martin), asking Martin to deliver a message for him to his brother John in London, where he encountered Harriet, renewed his attentions, and was happily accepted. Later that day they visit Randalls and find that Frank and Jane are there. Soon all is resolved and nothing remains but congratulations and offers of friendship.

Chapter 55

When the John Knightley family arrives from London with Harriet, Emma is overjoyed to find that her friend has set aside all thoughts of Mr. Knightley and turned her full attention to Robert Martin. Not only that, but Harriet's parents have been discovered; her father is a wealthy tradesman who is able to provide her with a sufficient income. When Emma meets Robert Martin, she finds that his character fully confirms to Knightley's praise of his worth. That September the two are married, and Emma and Knightley are united a month later, though only after overcoming some reluctance on the part of Emma's father. Oddly, several incidents of poultry theft in the neighborhood convince him that he needs protection, and that the only way of obtaining it is for Knightley to move to Hartfield. The only way this can be accomplished is for him to marry Emma, so he gives his blessing. When they marry, Mrs. Elton maintains that the ceremony is far inferior to her own, but everyone else is delighted at the union of Mr. George Knightley and Miss Emma Woodhouse.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Emma Woodhouse - The title character at the age of twenty-one is an inveterate matchmaker who concerns herself with the love lives of her friends while giving little attention to her own.
- Mr. Woodhouse - Emma's indulgent father is a widower, old and set in his ways, who hates change of any kind and is of a melancholy disposition, given to hypochondria and fear for the health of everyone around him.
- Mrs. Weston (Miss Taylor) - Emma's governess since her mother's death, she leaves the family at the beginning of the novel to get married. This was Emma's first successful effort at matchmaking, though she misses her friend terribly.
- Mr. Weston - A kindly landowner, his marriage to Miss Taylor is his second. He is the father of Frank Churchill.
- Isabella Knightley - Emma's older sister is married to John Knightley and has five children. She takes after her father, both in the weakness of her constitution and in her unreasonable fears about everything connected with her and her children.
- John Knightley - Isabella's husband is a lawyer who lacks patience with the social graces and often offends Emma and her father.
- George Knightley - Isabella's brother-in-law, he is thirty-seven years old, serious and highly respectable, a wealthy landowner and magistrate, and a close friend of the Woodhouses. He is the only man with the courage to speak openly to Emma of her faults. To the surprise of almost everyone, he winds up marrying her.
- Philip Elton - The young clergyman who becomes the object of Emma's matchmaking ambitions, he has no interest in Harriet Smith, but instead wants to marry Emma. When she rejects him, he quickly finds a wife elsewhere.

- Augusta (Hawkins) Elton - Elton meets her in Bath and marries her just a month later. She is rude, vain, self-important, and improves no one's impression of her husband.
- Frank Churchill - Mr. Weston's son by his first marriage, he is superficial and unreliable. He pretends to court Emma in order to hide his affection for Jane Fairfax, to whom he is secretly engaged and whom he eventually marries.
- Miss Bates - A plain-looking, undistinguished middle-aged spinster who lives with her elderly mother, she is kind to everyone, but exceptionally talkative.
- Jane Fairfax - The orphaned niece of Miss Bates who was taken in and trained as a teacher under the care of her father's commanding officer Colonel Campbell, she is beautiful and talented, but her lack of fortune interferes with her marital prospects. She ultimately marries Frank Churchill.
- Harriet Smith - A lovely seventeen-year-old in whom Emma takes an interest. She has no parentage of note, having been born out of wedlock. Emma decides to take her under her wing and tries to match her up with Mr. Elton, which turns into a disaster. Ultimately she finds wedded bliss with Robert Martin, a local farmer.
- Robert Martin - A farmer who loves Harriet and proposes to her. Emma does everything she can to break up the relationship because it interferes with her desire to match Harriet with Mr. Elton, but finally realizes her mistake and the two are married.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.” (ch.1)

“Mr. Knightley loves to find fault with me, you know - in a joke - it is all a joke. We always say what we like to one another.” (Emma, ch.1)

“[Emma] will never submit to anything requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding.” (Knightley, ch.5)

“She played and sang, and drew in almost every style; but steadiness had always been wanting; and in nothing had she approached the degree of excellence which she would have been glad to command, and ought not to have failed of.” (ch.6)

“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.” (ch.16)

“Mr. Knightley marry! No, I have never had such an idea, and I cannot adopt it now.”
(Emma, ch.26)

“General benevolence, but not general friendship, made a man what he ought to be. She could fancy such a man.” (ch.38)

“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!”
(Knightley, ch.43)

“It seemed as if there were an instantaneous impression in her favour, as if his eyes received the truth from hers, and all that had passed of good in her feelings were at once caught and honored. He looked at her with a glow of regard.” (ch.45)

“It darted through her with the speed of an arrow that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!” (ch.47)

“From family attachment and habit, and thorough excellence of mind, he had loved her, and watched over her from a girl, with an endeavour to improve her, and an anxiety for her doing right, which no other creature had at all shared.” (ch.48)

“The only source whence anything like consolation or composure could be drawn, was in the resolution of her own better conduct, and the hope that, however inferior in spirit and in gaiety might be the following and every future winter of her life to the past, it would yet find her more rational, more acquainted with herself, and leave her less to regret when it were gone.” (ch.48)

“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.” (Knightley, ch.49)

“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.” (ch.54)

“In spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union.” (ch.55)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. All of Jane Austen's protagonists undergo change in the course of the novels in which they are found. Compare and contrast the changes undergone by the title character in *Emma* and Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*. Pay special attention to the role of repentance in the changes the two young women experience.
2. Jane Austen often included weak father-figures in her novels. Compare and contrast the fathers in *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*. What do Mr. Woodhouse and Mr. Bennet have in common? In what ways are they different? Consider not only their character qualities, but also the ways in which they influence the lives of their daughters.
3. Miss Bates in Jane Austen's *Emma* and Mrs. Bennet in the same author's *Pride and Prejudice* share the trait of lacking a filter between their brains and their mouths. How does their talkativeness make them comic figures? Do you find them more humorous or more annoying? Compare and contrast the roles their uncontrolled tongues play in the two novels.
4. Jane Austen often included weak father-figures in her novels. Compare and contrast the fathers in *Emma* and *Persuasion*. What do Mr. Woodhouse and Sir Walter Elliot have in common? In what ways are they different? Consider not only their character qualities, but also the ways in which they influence the lives of their daughters.
5. Mr. Woodhouse, the father of the title character in Jane Austen's *Emma*, and Frederick Fairlie, the uncle into whose care his nieces are instructed in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*, both consider themselves to be invalids, though they are in reality hypochondriacs. These men, who should be the guides and protectors of the young ladies who are entrusted to their care, are anything but. Compare and contrast the two men and discuss how their weakness affects the lives of the girls under their care.
6. In Jane Austen's *Emma*, the meddlesome matchmaker Emma Woodhouse tries to raise Harriet Smith's social status and in the process renders her unwilling to marry men of her own class and unfit to marry those who are above her. Her dilemma is similar to that of Eliza Doolittle in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, who, after having been transformed through the tutelage of Henry Higgins, cries out, "I sold flowers. I didn't sell myself. Now you've made a lady of me and I'm not fit to sell anything else. I wish you'd left me where you found me." To what extent are the two young ladies in question similarly victimized by those who sought to make them "projects"? Which of the two is better off at the end of their respective stories?
7. A modern cinematic version of Jane Austen's *Emma* chose the title *Clueless*. Without bringing the movie into your essay, discuss the extent to which the title would have been a suitable one for Austen's original novel. To what extent and in what ways was Emma Woodhouse clueless?

8. Most of Jane Austen's heroines, such as Elizabeth Bennet, Elinor Dashwood, and Anne Elliot, are basically likeable people. When she created Emma Woodhouse, however, she recognized that she had brought to the printed page "a character whom no one but me will much like." Do you agree? Why or why not? If you find Emma likeable, why is this the case? If you don't, did your opinion change as the novel progressed? Why and to what extent?
9. When people talk about marriage partners deserving one another, they often imply that the partners are unequal in social status, talent, education, wealth, or character. Examine three of the couples in Jane Austen's *Emma* and discuss the question of desert. Does Emma deserve to marry Mr. Knightley? Does Frank Churchill deserve Jane Fairfax? Does Harriet Smith deserve Robert Martin? Why or why not? What may the author be suggesting in bringing these clearly unequal characters together at the end of the novel?
10. Readers of Jane Austen's *Emma* may readily conclude that Emma Woodhouse is most fortunate to receive an offer of marriage from George Knightley, who is almost twice her age and is clearly superior in wealth, social status, and character. What does Knightley see in Emma that draws him to her and leads him to marry her at the end of the story? Does the protagonist's treatment by the author allow the reader to see the same qualities that Knightley sees? What do you consider Emma's most important positive qualities?
11. Evaluate the maturity or lack thereof of the title character in Jane Austen's *Emma*. At the beginning of the novel she carries far more responsibility in her household than most girls her age, yet at the same time shows clear marks of immaturity in her understanding of the people around her and her dealings with them. Discuss the marks of maturity and immaturity found in Emma at the beginning of the story and analyze how and why she matures as the story progresses.
12. From the very beginning of Jane Austen's *Emma*, the title character insists that she intends never to marry. Why do you think this is the case? Is this an assertion of independence or an indication of fear? If the latter, what does she fear and how is that fear overcome by the end of the story? If the former, why does she choose to give up her dream of independence to marry George Knightley?
13. In Jane Austen's *Emma*, the title character considers herself to be well-equipped to bring couples together because of her insights into the natures of those around her. She is not, however, the only matchmaker in the story. Is matchmaking always a bad idea, destined to failure as it was repeatedly in the book, or can it sometimes be a helpful prod to a joyful union, as was the case with Mr. and Mrs. Weston? Use details from the novel to answer the question.
14. Jane Austen's father was a country pastor, but her portrayals of clergymen often are less than flattering. Discuss her portrayal of Mr. Elton in *Emma*. Does anything about the man indicate that he is a pastor or even a Christian? Analyze his character in the light of biblical qualifications for the pastorate and biblical characteristics of a godly man. Use details from the novel and specific Scripture references in your analysis.

15. Repentance and forgiveness play an important role in Jane Austen's *Emma*. Of particular note is the fact that the title character's awareness of her faults comes to her gradually, thus rendering her repentance gradual as well. Trace the steps by which Emma's eyes are opened to her sins and the ways in which she goes about demonstrating her repentance.
16. The society of Jane Austen's *Emma* is a very class-conscious one, yet the author seems ambivalent about this trait of the England in which she lives. Some characters are openly held up to ridicule for their emphasis on social distinctions, while others are thought foolish for ignoring them. How would you describe the author's stand on social stratification? Use specifics from the novel to support your analysis.
17. How can the title character of Jane Austen's *Emma*, who is reputedly witty and intelligent, be wrong so often about almost everything? Do her mistakes cause you to doubt her intelligence or insight? Why or why not? Support your answer with details from the novel.
18. Most readers would agree that the most admirable character in Jane Austen's *Emma* is George Knightley, the man who marries Emma at the end of the novel. Describe his most important qualities and discuss how these qualities are displayed in his behavior toward the other characters in the story.
19. Consider the description of love given by Paul in I Corinthians 13:4-7. Choose one of the characters in Jane Austen's *Emma* and evaluate that character on the basis of Paul's description. Be sure to support your analysis with specifics from the novel.
20. Consider the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23. Choose one of the characters in Jane Austen's *Emma* and evaluate that character according to the extent to which he or she demonstrates the qualities that provide evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life.
21. Christianity plays virtually no role in Jane Austen's *Emma*, yet many have argued that this, along with her other novels, reflects a Christian view of the world. Would you agree? Be sure to evaluate the moral universe in which the novel is set and the qualities of those characters who are considered admirable or are pictured in a negative fashion. Support your analysis with citations from Scripture.
22. Often major characters in novels are accompanied by foils - secondary characters who bring out the qualities of the leading figures by contrast. Choose one of the major characters in Jane Austen's *Emma*, either Emma Woodhouse or George Knightley, and discuss whether or not other characters in the story serve as foils, bringing out their most important qualities by contrast. Be specific.
23. In Jane Austen's *Emma*, the protagonist considers herself a good judge of character, and this leads her to interfere in their lives for their own good. She proves, however, to be anything but a good judge of character as the novel progresses. In fact, she is in many ways blind to her own character. In what ways does she fail to understand herself, and what are the consequences of these misunderstandings?

24. In Galatians 6:1, Paul says, “If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.” Criticism often comes easily, but the kind of constructive criticism Paul advocates is much harder. In Jane Austen’s *Emma*, George Knightley shows the capacity to “speak the truth in love” to Emma when he confronts her for her sins and follies. Cite specific incidents in the novel where he does this and show how his way of dealing with his young friend fits the biblical model.
25. Jane Austen’s writing career bridged the Age of Reason and the Romantic Era, and her writing shows characteristics of both. Based on your understanding of her novel *Emma*, which set of values do you find more dominant, feelings or reason? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
26. Jane Austen’s writing career bridged the Age of Reason and the Romantic Era, and her writing shows characteristics of both. Might one argue that the protagonist of her novel *Emma* matures by evolving from a girl dominated by romance to a young woman controlled by reason? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specific incidents and quotations from the novel.
27. In chapter 5 of Jane Austen’s *Emma*, Mr. Knightley says that she “will never submit to anything requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding.” Is this an accurate description of the protagonist? To what extent does she change by the end of the novel? Does she show increasing maturity in all of these qualities, or only in some?
28. Compare the characters of Emma Woodhouse and Frank Churchill in Jane Austen’s *Emma*. In what ways are they similar, particularly in the early stages of the reader’s acquaintance with them? While both ultimately change, do they change in the same ways? To what extent do they overcome their initial faults?
29. In Jane Austen’s *Emma*, both the protagonist and Mrs. Elton are controlling and manipulative, but the author leads us to sympathize with the one while despising the other. How does she accomplish this? What are the relevant differences between the two characters that cause the reader to respond so differently to their similar faults?
30. Analyze the relationship between the protagonist and her father in Jane Austen’s *Emma*. They clearly love one another dearly, but is their relationship good for either of them? Why or why not? How are both of them harmed by the ways they express their love for one another?
31. In chapter 16 of Jane Austen’s *Emma*, after the debacle of having Mr. Elton propose to her, Emma determines never again to interfere in the life of another person. How successful is she in keeping her promise to herself? Why does she struggle so much with this particular failing, and what finally cures her of it?

32. In chapter 38 of Jane Austen's *Emma*, the protagonist admiringly describes Mr. Knightley by saying of him, "General benevolence, but not general friendship, made a man what he ought to be. She could fancy such a man." To what extent is this an accurate description of Knightley? Is this what really attracts Emma to him, or are other factors involved?
33. In Jane Austen's *Emma*, to what extent is the protagonist motivated by jealousy in her actions? Consider in particular her reactions to Jane Fairfax, but also discuss how she responds to Harriet when she thinks Knightley looks on her favorably. How seriously does her struggle with jealousy affect her attitudes, decisions, and actions, and what problems does it cause?
34. In chapter 48 of Jane Austen's *Emma*, the narrator tells us that Emma, convinced that she will spend the rest of her life as a spinster caring for her father, muses, "The only source whence anything like consolation or composure could be drawn, was in the resolution of her own better conduct, and the hope that, however inferior in spirit and in gaiety might be the following and every future winter of her life to the past, it would yet find her more rational, more acquainted with herself, and leave her less to regret when it were gone." Evaluate this assessment of her future in terms of Emma's new priorities. To what extent do these words indicate increased maturity and a more admirable sense of values?
35. In chapter 54 of Jane Austen's *Emma*, the narrator describes Emma, happily looking forward to marriage, in these words: "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." Modern feminists generally are not pleased with this assessment of Emma's future or her relationship to her husband. Evaluate this quotation, both in terms of its truthfulness and in terms of its fidelity to a biblical view marriage. Is this what a Christian marriage should look like? Why or why not?
36. Some critics have argued that the central lesson of Jane Austen's *Emma* is the importance of humility. Do you agree? How does the author illustrate this, both positively and negatively? Is her approach to the question a biblical one? What does she omit that a biblical understanding of humility would include?
37. Jane Austen once remarked that her novels were about "three or four families in a country village." Some critics have dismissed her fiction as parochial, yet others argue that she has taken isolated characters in a somewhat claustrophobic setting and given to them a universality that is true of all great fiction. *Emma*, considered by many to be her most complex novel, certainly focuses on a few families in the country village of Highbury. Discuss the extent to which it is universal in its applicability. Why is the book able to speak to people living in a very different society two centuries after it was written? Support your argument with specifics from the novel.

38. Some commentators on Jane Austen's *Emma* have noted that Miss Bates, despite her rambling verbosity, is really the most clear-sighted character in the story. Unlike those around her who are so often self-deceived, she sees things as they are. Do you agree? Support your assessment of this comic character with specific quotations from the novel.