

# Emma Chapter 8

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# Chapter 8

Emma

# Summary

- Harriet continues to spend more and more time at Hartfield with Emma. Mr. Knightley visits while Harriet is out, and he reveals that 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.

# Commentary

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.