



Emma

Jane Austen (1775 - 1815)

Read by:	Elizabeth Klett	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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Published in three volumes in 1815, *Emma* was the second to last of Jane Austen's novels, and treats the social concerns of Regency England with the light and satirical touch of a master. When she set out to write *Emma*, Austen wrote that she was "going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like." Emma Woodhouse, the heroine of *Emma*, is wealthy, pretty, self-satisfied and willful young woman who lives on Hartfield Estate in a small English town with her hypochondriac father. Apart from a friendship with her neighbor Mr Knightly, the proprietor of Donwell Abbey she has nothing but time on her hands. She decides to take charge of the affairs of young Harriet Smith, the illegitimate daughter of some unknown gentleman, and tries to marry her off to an eligible suitor, the first of many misguided matchmaking attempts.

The well drawn characters are as much of the appeal as of the book as the singularly English screwball comedy of a plot. There is the social climbing Mr Elton, who snubs Harriet for a nouveau-riche wife; Robert Martin, the educated and respectable local bachelor farmer; Jane Fairfax, the talented and elegant orphaned niece of the impoverished spinster neighbor Miss Bates; Frank Church, who will inherit a fortune from an aunt; and, of course, Mr Knightley, who serves as the voice of conscience for much of the time. The story ends happily after every possible mishap, much as we hope it will.

Jane Austen (December 16, 1775 – July 18, 1817) was the seventh of eight children born to George and Cassandra Austen. Both parents were members of the lower ranks of the landed gentry. Her father was the rector of Anglican parishes in Steventon, Hampshire. She was educated by her father and brothers, and her family was supportive of her artistic ambitions. In her early twenties she began publishing novels of romantic fiction set among the landed gentry that focus on relationships and marriage as the only path available for women to achieve economic security and social standing. Although the plots of her books are quite comic, she is unsparing in her depiction of the people and the manners of the times and finds abundant opportunities for satire and trenchant social commentary.

Jane Austen was relatively unknown in her lifetime. Although she published four popular novels in rapid succession between 1811 and 1815, they were published anonymously and she had few reviews and little recognition. Her nephew published *A Memoir of Jane Austen* in 1869 that introduced her to a broader audience, and by the middle of the 20th century she was recognized by academia as one of the great English writers. Her focus on the realities of the lives of women in the late 18th and early 19th centuries gained even greater currency with the advent of feminism and women's studies. Her work has a large and ardent fan base that results in her works consistently ranking among the top best selling and most highly regarded classics in all literature.