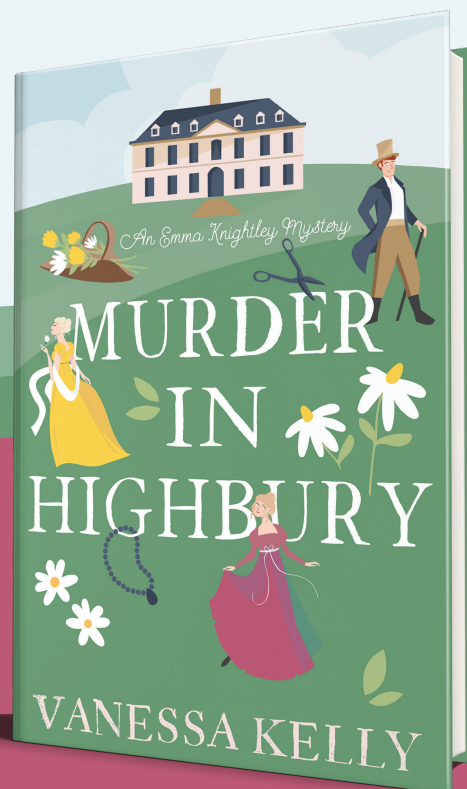


A
BOOK CLUB KIT

For
MURDER IN
HIGHBURY

An Emma Knightley Mystery

By
VANESSA KELLY





A CONVERSATION WITH VANESSA KELLY, AUTHOR OF *MURDER IN HIGHBURY*

Please tell us a little bit about *Murder in Highbury*.

The Emma Knightley Mysteries feature the title character in the role of amateur investigator. Emma, now happily married to George Knightley, resides with him and her elderly father at Hartfield, her childhood home. Quick-witted, clever, and with a creative imagination, Emma will discover an uncanny knack for solving murders, a talent soon to be called on when murder comes to the sleepy village of Highbury.

Each book in the series will showcase well-known settings and beloved characters from Emma, like Harriet Martin (the former Miss Smith), Mrs. Weston (Emma's former governess), and Frank Churchill. George Knightley will also figure prominently, both as Emma's husband and as the local magistrate. Subsequent books will possibly feature crossovers with characters and settings from other Austen novels, as Emma's world occasionally expands beyond the village of Highbury.

How did you become a writer?

From an early age I was a voracious reader—I remember reading books on my own before I went to kindergarten. I grew up in a noisy, sometimes fractious family and books were a great escape for me. There was nothing better than disappearing into a story and discovering new worlds; nothing was more comforting than curling up in bed with a good book. That love for a good story eventually led me to studying English literature in both undergrad and grad school, requiring a lot of writing. A long and winding road later, I finally switched from being a professional researcher and non-fiction writer to writing fiction—which turned out to be as great of an escape as reading fiction!

Why the Regency Era?

I grew up in small-town New Jersey in a very historic colonial town. We were proud of our collective history, and from an early age we were taught about the Revolutionary War and our town's rather significant role in it. That was the history I knew, and the English—if we thought about them at all—were the bad guys. Fortunately, my sister had a British pen pal in high school. She kindly sent my sister a bunch of Georgette Heyer novels and then passed them on to me. And boy, did they rock my young world! I LOVED those books. I thought they were the most amazing stories I'd ever read: the dashing men in regimentals or riding gear, the society parties, the country estates, the fascinating but strangely disciplined world of polite society—all juxtaposed with the occasional portrayal of the grittier side of life. Pretty heady stuff for a kid from small-town America! I devoured those books like candy, and it sparked a love for the Regency Era that I still hold today.

Why write a book based on the character Emma?

I freely admit that it was my editor's idea, and I think it's brilliant. I leapt at the chance to write this series, because I just adore Emma, both the book and the character—it was clearly meant to be! I've reread it several times now, and it always affirms my sense that it's my all-around favorite book. It's so funny, but also such an incisive, clever, and occasionally poignant coming-of-age story. And as someone who grew up in a small town, I can relate to the vibe of life in Highbury.

Did you have any apprehension about writing a series based on Jane Austen's books?

What author in her right mind wouldn't have qualms about treading on such hallowed turf? Thankfully, I'm not the first author or creator to do so. Austen is still massively popular, with several movie and TV adaptations of her books released over many years. The enormous popularity of Netflix's *Bridgerton* series also points to an enduring fascination with the era of Jane Austen. In the literary world there are numerous re-imaginings of *Emma*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and the other novels, that reflect a seemingly insatiable appetite for all things Austen—including Austen-based mystery series. Besides, writing a series based on the clever character of Emma seemed like a challenge too good to resist!

BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS FOR *MURDER IN Highbury*



- 1 Jane Austen famously said, “I’m going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like.” Do you find Emma in *Murder in Highbury* to be likeable? What characteristics do you find appealing in her? Is there anything you don’t like about Emma?
- 2 In many ways, Austen’s *Emma* is a coming-of-age story. In *Murder in Highbury*, Emma has certainly matured, but does she still possess some of her original flaws or blind spots? What are they and how do they affect the plot?
- 3 When Emma and Harriet discover the body of Mrs. Elton, they both react very differently. Hopefully, none of us will ever have the misfortune to stumble upon a corpse, but how do you think you would react in similar or unexpected circumstances? Do you think you would respond more like Emma or Harriet? What qualities does Emma possess that enable her to keep a cool head?
- 4 Who is your favorite character in *Murder in Highbury*, and why? Is there one character that you especially identify with?
- 5 Emma and Mr. Knightley were family friends for years before their marriage, with Mr. Knightley often playing the role of mentor. Have you ever had a friendship that transformed into more? How did it turn out?
- 6 In what ways do Emma and Mr. Knightley suit each other? Despite their age difference and experience, do you think they’ve managed to create a marriage of true equals?
- 7 Emma has always been very close to her father, caring for him and managing his many eccentricities. How has her relationship with Mr. Woodhouse changed because of Mrs. Elton’s murder?
- 8 During the Regency period, it would be unheard of for a woman to investigate a murder—especially a woman of Emma’s standing. In fact, she is warned several times that such behavior is inappropriate. What are the consequences of her decision to carry on anyway, both good and bad?
- 9 Have you ever gone against prevailing opinions or expectations to defend someone or something you believed in? How did it turn out? Would you do it again?
- 10 Why do you think Emma is so determined to seek justice when others are advising her to stand down?
- 11 While Highbury is a close-knit and friendly community, class distinctions still exist. How do these distinctions play out in *Murder in Highbury*, especially for characters without much money?
- 12 Highbury is a peaceful village with strong social bonds. Mrs. Elton’s murder is a great shock to the villagers. How does this act of violence disrupt the social fabric of Highbury? What are some of the ways this disruption is manifested?

ABOUT THE BOOK

FROM MATCHMAKING TO CRIME SOLVING,
EMMA KNIGHTLEY ALWAYS MAKES
THE CONNECTION.



In a captivating new mystery series, Jane Austen's Emma Knightley entertains a different role in Highbury, going from clever matchmaker to Regency England's shrewdest sleuth . . .

Less than one year into her marriage to respected magistrate George Knightley, Emma has grown unusually content with her newfound partnership and refreshed sense of independence. The height of summer sees the former Miss Woodhouse gracefully balancing the meticulous management of her elegant family estate and a flurry of social engagements, with few worries apart from her beloved father's health.

But the cheery circumstances change in an instant when Emma and Harriet Martin, now the wife of one of Mr. Knightley's tenant farmers, discover a hideous shock at the local church. The corpse of Mrs. Augusta Elton, the vicar's wife, has been discarded on the altar steps and the ornate necklace she often wore stripped from her neck . . .

As a chilling murder mystery unfolds and chaos descends upon the tranquil village of Highbury, the question isn't simply who committed the crime, but who wasn't secretly wishing for the unpleasant woman's demise. When suspicions fall on a harmless local, Emma decides to discreetly investigate. Armed with wit, unwavering determination, and extensive social connections, she will protect the innocent and expose the ruthless culprit hiding in plain sight.



ABOUT VANESSA KELLY



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Vanessa Kelly is a multiple *USA Today* bestselling author of historical mysteries and historical romances published in eleven languages. She has won multiple awards, including the prestigious Maggie Medallion for best historical romance. After receiving her MA in English literature from Rutgers University, Vanessa spent several years in the Ph.D. program at the University of Toronto, studying women authors of the 18th Century, including Jane Austen and Frances Burney. She lives in Ottawa, Canada, with her husband.

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