***Emma***

***Chapter 26***

***Vol2Chapter8***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

The Coles party begins with the important people in society such as Mr. Knightley, the Westons and Emma arriving first. The people of lesser consequence such as Harriet, Miss Fairfax and Miss Bates arrive after dinner. Before their arrival, everyone discusses the pianoforte that appeared in the Bates household earlier. No one is sure who purchased the piano for the Bates and therefore it is assumed that Colonel Campbell paid for it.

However, Emma and Mr. Churchill agree that Mr. Dixon must have purchased it. They discuss this for a time and then the rest of the guests arrive. Mr. Churchill is introduced to Miss Harriet Smith and they both think highly of one another.

As everyone congregates, Mrs. Weston reveals to Emma that Mr. Knightley sent his carriage over for Miss Bates and Miss Fairfax so they did not have to walk. Emma thinks that this is merely because he was being nice, but Mrs. Weston seems to think that Mr. Knightley might be in love with Miss Fairfax and sent not only the carriage but the piano as well.

Emma is aghast at this for a number of reasons. The first being that she wants Donwell Abbey to go to her nephew, which will not happen if Mr. Knightley marries. The two discuss this for some time until tea is completed.

After tea the entertainment portion of the evening begins and Emma is asked to perform. She is joined by Mr. Churchill, who has been sitting next to her all night, both at dinner and whenever a seat was available. After two songs Miss Fairfax takes over and Emma uses this opportunity to converse with Mr. Knightley to see if he was the one that gave the pianoforte to Miss Fairfax. However, she is unable to get anything out of him. After two more songs, Mr. Knightley worries that Miss Fairfax will do her voice harm by singing any more and gets Miss Bates to put a stop to it.

It is then decided that everyone will dance, and Mr. Churchill asks Emma to dance with him. She keeps an eye on Mr. Knightley to make sure that he is not dancing with Miss Fairfax, and for now her fears are allayed.

Miss Bates wants to return home and so ends the dancing for the evening. Mr. Churchill reveals to Emma that he is glad he did not have to dance with Miss Fairfax, as her dancing seemed languid when compared to Emma's.

Emma arrives at the Coles’ party behind Mr. Knightley. Because Knightley usually walks, Emma is surprised that he has come in his carriage. At dinner, it is revealed that Jane Fairfax has received the mysterious gift of a pianoforte. People assume the piano is from Colonel Campbell, but Emma tells Frank she suspects that it is a gift from Mr. Dixon. When Jane arrives later, she blushes when questioned about the piano.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Weston tells Emma that Mr. Knightley brought his carriage so that he could convey Jane home. Mrs. Weston suggests that a match may be forming between Jane and Mr. Knightley, but Emma resists this supposition vigorously, explaining that she cannot bear the thought of Mr. Knightley marrying because then her nephew, George and Isabella’s son Henry, will not be able to inherit Donwell Abbey, the Knightley estate in the town of the same name. Mrs. Weston suspects that Mr. Knightley is the one who sent Jane the pianoforte.

Emma and Jane sing and play the piano for the company, with Frank accompanying. When Frank persuades Jane to sing one more song after her voice has begun to grow hoarse, Mr. Knightley intervenes. Emma questions Mr. Knightley about the carriage and pianoforte. His answers convince her that he did not send the gift, but do not enable her to decide if he has feelings for Jane. When impromptu dancing begins, she is relieved that he does not ask Jane to dance. Emma is also pleased that Frank immediately asks her and not Jane for a dance. There is time for only two dances, however, before the party breaks up. Frank comments to Emma that he is lucky the dancing had to end; otherwise he would have found himself asking Jane Fairfax for a dance.

Emma arrives at the Coles' party at the same moment as [Mr. Knightley](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Knightley), who is uncharacteristically in a carriage. Emma observes that Mr. Knightley usually travels on foot. At dinner, people are gossiping about a surprise gift of a pianoforte received by [Jane Fairfax](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Jane_Fairfax), an accomplished musician. Emma is sitting next to Frank and tells him the gift may be from Mr. Dixon. Mrs. Weston mentions that Mr. Knightley brought his carriage to escort Jane home and speculates that he might be the one who gifted Jane the piano, but Emma dismisses the idea of any attachment. When the rest of the guests arrive after dinner, she and Jane are asked to play, and Frank sings with both women. Emma notices Mr. Knightley paying a lot of attention to Jane. When the dancing starts and Mr. Knightley does not ask Jane to dance, Emma feels relieved.

***Analysis:***

Mr. Churchill is extremely attentive to Emma during the party, and is quite obvious in his affection for her. Strangely, this does not seem to bother Emma much at all.

However, the idea of Mr. Knightley marrying anyone seems to bother her quite a lot, as she makes no attempts to disguise this. We are left to wonder why she is so adamant about Mr. Knightley remaining single.

Emma seems to be somewhat jealous of Miss Fairfax, and Mr. Churchill's comments before the of the night seem to allay this somewhat.

***Critical Study:***

Frank returns from London and evidences no discomposure about the purpose of the trip; but Emma is ready not only to overlook that but also to wonder how soon, in light of his possible feeling for her, she should "throw coldness into her air" toward him.

When she reaches the Coles' for the party, she praises George Knightley — who for once has brought out his carriage — for being a proper gentleman for the occasion; he only laughs good-humoredly. As those who are to come early for dinner arrive, Frank seats himself agreeably beside her. During the meal Mrs. Cole reports the news that a new, large pianoforte arrived that day for Jane, who has been puzzled about it, though of course it must be from Colonel Campbell. Emma thinks that Mr. Dixon has sent it surreptitiously, and Frank agrees in such a polite way with her words that he seems to be agreeing about Mr. Dixon, who had preferred Jane's playing to Miss Campbell's. Ambiguously he concludes his remarks about the instrument by saying, "And now I can see it in no other light than as an offering of love."

The ladies are in the drawing room after dinner when the other ladies — including Miss Bates and

Jane — arrive for the remainder of the party. As soon as the men join them, Frank makes his way directly to Emma. After an interruption by Mr. Cole, Emma sees Frank looking intently across the room at Jane, but he says that it is only on account of the way her hair is done and goes over purportedly to ask her about it. Mrs. Weston joins Emma to say that George's carriage has brought Jane and Miss Bates and that she thinks a match is making "between Mr. Knightley and Jane Fairfax." Emma will not believe this, declaring that "Mr. Knightley must not marry!" and thereby cut little Henry off from inheriting the Donwell Abbey estates. She even mimics Miss Bates to indicate the absurdity of George's ever marrying Jane, but Mrs. Weston hints that the pianoforte may have come from George.

Emma is asked to play and is joined in singing by Frank. Then while Jane plays and Frank joins her also in singing, George talks with Emma in such a way that she is convinced that he would never send a gift secretly to anybody. When the first of two dances is proposed, Frank secures Emma's hand for it and George, instead of asking Jane or anybody else to dance, goes and talks with Mr. Cole. Emma feels "no longer an alarm for Henry" and lets herself enjoy the dancing.

Emma continues to let herself be impressed by Frank, while he adroitly replies to her suspicions about Jane with words that seem to agree with her and sometimes do. The reader may be beginning to wonder some about his words and actions, but Emma is not. She is, in fact, so optimistically sure of things and of herself that unconsciously she puts George in the same category of "not marrying" with herself. She does this in a context which involves another instance of reversal, though a milder one than the climactic one in the first volume: Mrs. Weston is now the matchmaker. For a moment, at least, her and Emma's roles are reversed; and through this Miss Austen may be making a wry comment on the influences of human relationships.

The reader who finishes the novel and then re-reads this chapter will find, as he often will in other chapters, a great deal of irony — for instance, in the manner in which Emma (and perhaps the reader also on a first perusal) is shrewdly misled by Frank's conversation and observations, likewise in Emma's reason given as to why George must never marry. But there is also immediate irony which the reader can find, for example, in George's reply to Emma's congratulating him for bringing his carriage to the party. Though irony always contains some kind of special truth, in this case it is both obvious and realistic.

***Summary part by part and analysis***

***Summary part 1:***

[Frank](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill) returns with his haircut, lively and flippant about the experiences. Emma defends his behavior to [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley), arguing that an exception should be made for silly things done by sensible people.

***Analysis part 1:***

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

***Summary part 2:***

[Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley) arrives at the Coles by carriage, though he usually prefers walking. Emma approves of this change, which she declares fits his gentlemanly station better. Emma anticipates a pleasurable evening at the party, and is pleased with the special attention that [Frank](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill) displays toward her.

***Analysis part 2***

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

***Summary part 3***:

[Mrs. Cole](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) shares that [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/jane-fairfax) has received the surprise gift of a piano, which everyone assumes to be from [Colonel Campbell](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters). [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse), however, suspects that it is a gift from [Mr. Dixon](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) and prods [Frank](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill) into agreeably sharing her suspicion. As she talks with Frank, Emma learns more about him and his situation at Enscombe. Frank says he has great influence with his aunt, and excepting one point that he does not mention, believes he may persuade her to anything.

***Analysis part 3:***

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

***Summary Part 4:***

[Mrs. Weston](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) informs Emma that [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley) has come in his carriage so that he can assist Jane home. Mrs. Weston imagines a match between Mr. Knightley and Jane, but Emma reacts violently against the suggestion. She declares that Mr. Knightley must not marry and deprive her nephew, Henry, of inheriting Donwell Abbey; Emma feels such a match to the impoverished Jane would be imprudent and shameful, additionally connecting Mr. Knightley to the frivolous [Miss Bates](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters). Nonetheless, Mrs. Weston believes the piano to be Mr. Knightley’s gift.

***Analysis Part 4:***

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

***Summary Part 5:***

The guests call for musical entertainment, and Emma leads the piano playing with pleasure. Frank accompanies, and then Emma resigns her place to [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/jane-fairfax), whose talent she acknowledges to be superior. After several songs, [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley) prevents the company from tiring out Jane’s voice. Music is replaced by dancing, and Frank immediately asks Emma to be his partner. Emma is relieved that Mr. Knightley does not ask Jane. She leaves the party happy with Frank’s favor and reassured of Mr. Knightley’s lack of romantic interest in Jane.

***Analysis Part 5:***

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