***Emma***

***Chapter 34***

***Vol2Chapter16***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

As Mrs. Elton settles into society at Highbury, she throws a great deal of dinner parties. Not wanting to seem rude, Emma decides to throw a dinner party at Hartfield and invites the Eltons to join them. Mr. And Mrs. Weston are invited, as is Mr. Knightley. However, an eighth guest must be found, so Harriet is invited.

However, much to Emma's relief she refuses to come, so Emma invites Miss Fairfax instead. Emma feels quite guilty that Mr. Knightley thinks she has been avoiding Miss Fairfax and this gives her a great opportunity to change his opinion.

Her father is quite happy with eight guests, and a letter arrives stating that Mr. John Knightley will be arriving with two of his sons the day of the party. Since they cannot keep him from coming, the number of guests is enlarged to nine, greatly bothering Mr. Woodhouse.

The night of the party arrives and Mr. Weston is called away, reducing the number of guests back to eight to the pleasure of Mr. Woodhouse. The conversation centers on Miss Fairfax's trip to the post office that day, since it had rained. Although she missed being rained on, Mrs. Elton loudly begins to assert that Miss Fairfax must no longer get her own mail, and that she will send one of her servants instead.

Miss Fairfax resists and then changes the subject. Handwriting is discussed and the subject of Mr. Frank Churchill is raised, since he has beautiful handwriting for a man. Mr. Knightley uses this opportunity to sneer at Mr. Churchill and mocks him gently. Mrs. Weston and Emma spring to Mr. Churchill's defense and the evening continues without any further problems.

***Analysis:***

Again, our suspicions are roused in regard to Miss Fairfax. Why would a woman in such poor health walk to the post office every day? Her refusal to have this task removed from her deepens this suspicion.

Emma wonders if she is expecting a letter from a certain someone and we are left to wonder with her.

More instances of society in this time period are revealed as Emma plans a party to which she must invite people she cannot stand in order to appear polite. This was quite common at the time.

***Detailed Summary:***

Fulfilling a social obligation, Emma plans a dinner party for Mrs. Elton. Harriet asks to be excused from attending, which gives Emma the opportunity to ease her conscience regarding Jane Fairfax, who, at Harriet’s announced absence, is promptly invited to fill the empty eighth seat. Mr. John Knightley is also included because he will be in Highbury, accompanying his two eldest sons on a visit to their aunt and grandfather.

At the party, Mr. John Knightley gently reproaches Jane for fetching letters from the post office that morning in the rain. Jane acts as if the situation is not a big deal but ends up blushing and watery-eyed, and soon the rest of the party begins discussing the matter. Mrs. Elton insists that her servant should be given the task of retrieving Jane’s letters, and Jane firmly resists. The conversation moves to handwriting. Mr. Knightley praises Emma’s penmanship but dissents when she praises the penmanship of Frank Churchill. Jane’s eagerness to fetch her own letters rouses Emma’s suspicions, but she decides not to trouble Jane by questioning her.

***Critical Study:***

Everybody seems to be inviting the Eltons for dinners and evening parties. Emma too feels that she must satisfy the situation by giving them a dinner, to which she also invites the Westons, George, and Harriet. To her happiness Harriet begs off, and Jane is invited in her place. Emma is apprehensive when she learns that John Knightley is to come on that very day to leave his two oldest boys for a visit, for

Mr. Woodhouse does not believe in more than eight at the dinner table and John is likely to be disagreeable. Things turn out well, though, when Mr. Weston has to go out of town on unexpected business that day and when John proves agreeable after all. In fact, John is quite affable with Jane, whom he has seen that day on her way to the post office. When he talks about how marriage and a family change one's eagerness about getting letters, her reaction is "a blush, a quivering lip, a tear in the eye."

Talk of Jane's walk to the post office in the rain reaches Mrs. Elton, who "will not allow her to do such a thing again." She is extremely officious about it, declaring that her servant will pick up the Bateses' mail too, although Jane insists otherwise and changes the subject. Talk of handwriting leads George to say that "Emma's hand" is stronger than the style of her sister and to add a bit later that Frank's writing "is too small — wants strength." As the group starts for the dinner table, Emma wonders about Jane's constant morning walks for the mail and suspects that she does it "in full expectation of hearing from some one very dear." She determines not to utter a word to hurt Jane's feelings.

In addition to illustrating further Mr. Woodhouse's fussiness and Emma's sense of social obligation, this chapter deepens the mystery of Jane. Though Emma still thinks that the problem is Mr. Dixon, she nonetheless seems to be developing a degree of sympathy for, if not understanding of, Jane. Excepting perhaps the reader, no one seems really to notice the compliment that George utters about "Emma's hand."

***Critical Analysis:***

Emma decides to have a party for the Eltons at Hartfield to hide her contempt for the couple. Besides the Eltons, Emma invites Mr. Knightley, the Westons, and Jane Fairfax. During the party, they discuss Jane's trip to the post office and her handwriting. Mr. Knightley makes another disparaging comment about Frank Churchill, claiming his writing is like a woman's, while Emma wonders what letters Jane might receive. Are they sent by Mr. Dixon, or the Campbells, or another person altogether?

Although it is obvious to all that Emma dislikes Mrs. Elton, she is forced to invite the Eltons to dinner at Hartfield for reasons of propriety. There may be subtle signs and indications of animosity between the two women, but Emma cannot allow such a public statement of dislike. Propriety takes precedence over true feelings and emotions.

In light of Mr. Knightley's earlier comment about how others have snubbed Jane Fairfax, Emma attempts to remedy the situation. Her invitation to Jane, unlike inviting Mrs. Elton, is genuine and sincere. She invites Jane Fairfax as a way to right her earlier wrongs, but she is also interested in unraveling the mystery of Jane and Mr. Dixon. She still suspects that Jane is somehow involved with Mr. Dixon, even though she has no real evidence. All of the real evidence points to Frank Churchill instead. (This chapter also reinforces Mr. Knightley's dislike of Frank Churchill, which goes beyond the objections that he states). This suggests a different motive for Emma's interest in Jane Fairfax. It is now less jealousy and more an idle curiosity. Jane is hiding some important information. What that entails will soon be more clear to Emma.

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

***Summary part 1:***

[Mrs. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) receives social attention from everyone in town. [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) plans a dinner for the Eltons at Hartfield, eager to extricate herself from any suspicions that she harbors ill feelings towards Mrs. Elton (even though she does). When [Harriet](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) cannot come, Emma takes the opportunity of amending her neglect of [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/jane-fairfax) and invites her instead. She also invites [Isabella](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) and [John Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters), who will be in the area.

***Analysis part 1:***

Emma, very aware of her social rank, is also aware of her social obligations. Her pride ensures that she carries out every duty expected towards Mrs. Elton, and it also spurs her to improve her behavior towards Jane Fairfax.

***Summary part 2:***

During the party, [Mr. John Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) talks with [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/jane-fairfax), solicitously scolding her for walking through the rain to fetch her [letters](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/symbols/letters). Jane blushes but insists that she enjoys her walks and values letters of friendship. [Mrs. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) overhears and decides that she will have her servant fetch Jane’s letters for her, but Jane just as determinedly objects that she will continue to fetch her own letters. [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) suspects that Jane has been receiving letters from some one very dear, whom she keeps secret.

***Analysis part 2***

Here, as in other cases, Emma interprets more interesting motives behind Jane’s determination to fetch her own letters. She continues to interpret Jane’s behavior through the narrative she has created between Jane and Mr. Dixon. Ironically, Emma is half-right: there is a secret story regarding those letters, but it involves not Dixon but rather the very man Emma believes is in love with her, Emma! So even when Emma's insight is right about a situation, her fancies and vanities still stop her from getting it entirely right.

***Summary Part 3:***

The conversation turns to handwriting, and [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse)’s handwriting is praised. Emma in turn praises [Frank](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill)’s handwriting, but [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley) counters that it is weak and womanly.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Emma and Mr. Knightley continue to disagree over their impressions of Frank, this time literally reading personality between the lines of his handwriting.