***Emma***

***Chapter 35***

***Vol2Chapter17***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

As the dinner party continues, Mrs. Elton converses with Miss Fairfax on a variety of subjects. It seems that Miss Fairfax wants to become a governess, a position that seems to be appalling to Mrs. Elton. They continue on until Mr. Weston arrives for tea.

Mr. John Knightley is shocked that a man who must certainly be exhausted after a long day would walk over to another man's house for tea. Mr. Weston, however, does not notice any disruption he is causing and immediately goes over to Emma and Mrs. Weston.

He reveals a letter that he just received from Mr. Churchill. It seems that Mr. Churchill will be visiting them again very soon, which pleases Mrs. Weston very much. Emma, however, is almost silenced by the agitation she feels.

***Analysis:***

Emma's reaction to Mr. Churchill's letter is quite interesting given her former avowals that she would never be more than friends with him. She seems very agitated and confused, a condition that does not often strike her.

Everyone else seems to be pleased, and it will be interesting to see how Mr. Churchill receives Mrs. Elton and if there will be any reason for jealousy between Emma and Miss Fairfax.

***Detailed Summary:***

The women gather in the drawing room after dinner, and Mrs. Elton pursues the subject of letter-retrieval with Jane. She also insists on helping Jane find a governess position, though Jane explains that she will not seek a place until after she sees the Campbells in midsummer. The men come in, and Mr. Weston, who has been on business in London, appears. He brings a letter from Frank, reporting that Mrs. Churchill has decided that the household should make an extended visit in London. This news means that Frank will be able to be in Highbury a good deal. Mr. and Mrs. Weston are pleased, Emma is somewhat agitated, and Mr. Knightley seems unexcited by the news.

After dinner, Emma notices with a bit of dismay that the conversation seems to break into two distinct parties.

Even her best efforts as a hostess don’t detach Mrs. Elton from Jane’s side.

Prodded by Mrs. Elton into talking about her future, Jane says that she won’t be returning to live with the Campbells once they return from Ireland.

She’s determined to make her own living as a governess.

We interrupt this program for a brief history lesson:

Amazingly enough, nineteenth-century England isn’t exactly known for its gender equality.

Unmarried gentlewomen had very few options. And those options weren’t exactly lucrative.

If you happened to have wealthy relatives, you could sponge off of them for the rest of your life.

If you didn’t have wealthy relatives, you could become a governess.

This involved caring for whiny kids (and making pretty awful wages) for the rest of your life. (For a happier ending to this story, see Jane Eyre.)

That’s it. Pretty short interruption, huh? That’s because there weren’t all that many options out there.

Mrs. Elton, helpful as ever, barges into the conversation and demands that Jane allow her to find a family for Jane.

Jane refuses. Mrs. Elton refuses to accept her refusal. (Again. And again. And again.)

Mr. Weston enters with news: Frank writes that he will soon move with his aunt to a vacation spot about nine miles away from Highbury.

It’s close enough to allow Frank to come over all the time.

Emma’s thrilled. Mr. Knightley doesn’t look so pleased.

***Critical Study:***

During the later part of the party, Jane mentions that she must become a governess, which she compares to the slave trade. Mr. Weston arrives at the party after a day of business in London and gives Mrs. Weston a letter from Frank Churchill, who is returning to Highbury since his aunt's health improved.

This chapter reveals the likely fate of Jane Fairfax ­ since she is not from a wealthy family, although raised by one, she must go into a profession as a governess. This is a sharp step down the social ladder. As raised by the Campbells, she was part of the elite and lived as Emma does now. While Emma is an heiress who will be at the center of society even if she remains single, Jane Fairfax, despite her equal talents, must depend on a good marriage (the solution Mrs. Weston found to increase her status in society) or else she will be forced into a demeaning life as a spinster, much like her aunt, Miss Bates. The comparison between the governess trade and the slave trade highlights this injustice.

The chapter also indicates that Frank Churchill will soon return to Highbury. His aunt's health was not the reason for his absence, as Mr. Weston indicates. It was rather her need to exert control over Frank and demand his loyalty. Now that she has flexed her authority over Frank, he is temporarily free to return to Highbury. This is an additional reminder that Frank Churchill is not able to act without considering his aunt's demands. This may explain whatever reluctance he has to admit his feelings or emotions with regards to Emma or anyone else.

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

***Summary part 1:***

When the ladies retire to the drawing room after dinner, [Mrs. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) continues to impose her services on [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/jane-fairfax). After failing to get her way with the [letters](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/symbols/letters), she insists on helping Jane attain a governess position. Jane, however, informs her that she will not make any inquiries until after she sees the Campbells in midsummer.

***Analysis part 1:***

Mrs. Elton’s attempt to help Jane out is part comical and part aggravating, as Jane clearly does not want her services with letters or job hunting. Indeed, though Mrs. Elton does not know it, such “assistance” would actually be a disservice to Jane’s plans. She does not want to be a governess. She wants to marry Frank.

***Summary part 2:***

[Mr. Weston](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) joins the party after a day in London. The introverted [Mr. John Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) is amazed that Mr. Weston should desire to socialize instead of staying home after such a day of business and travel. Mr. Weston, however, happily announces that he bears a [letter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/symbols/letters) from [Frank](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill). The letter announces his impending visit, to the delight of [Mrs. Weston](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters), the agitation of [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse), and the indifference of [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley).

***Analysis part 2***

Austen’s character sketches are lively and thorough, as she enters various—even minor—characters’ perspectives and delineates their perception of others. Mr. Weston’s sociability baffles the more reserved Mr. John Knightley.