***Emma***

***Chapter 36***

***Vol2Chapter18***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

Mr. Churchill's arrival is announced to be sometime in May since his aunt was ordered to move to a warmer climate and has selected London. This means that Mr. Churchill will be able to visit them very often.

Mrs. Elton goes on and on about the Churchills while Mr. Weston looks for an escape. Her incessant comparisons of everything at Highbury to her old place of residence, Maple Grove, continue.

Tea is served and everyone breaks off into their own groups. Mr. And Mrs. Weston play cards with Mr. Woodhouse and Mr. Elton. This leaves Mrs. Elton in want of attention, which no one seems to want to provide.

Mr. John Knightley takes this time to speak with Emma regarding his sons, who will be staying behind with the Woodhouses after he leaves the next day. He is worried that they will be a bother to Mr. Woodhouse and to Emma since she has been so busy lately.

Emma laughs this off and is surprised that her brother-in-law thinks that she is that much busier.

As the dinner party winds down, Mr. Weston and Mrs. Elton speak at cross-purposes. Mr. Weston expresses the desire that Mrs. Elton will one day meet his son and talks about how Frank's aunt uses her sickness to manipulate his son. Mrs. Elton takes Mrs. Churchill's part so she can pivot the conversation back to her own family and talk about her sister. Mr. Weston notes that Frank's aunt has "out-Churchill'd them all in high and mighty claims: but in herself, I assure you, she is an upstart." Mrs. Elton voices her own horror of upstarts, and Mr. Weston moves away at the first opportunity.

John Knightley takes his leave of the party; he is heading back to London and leaving his two eldest boys behind in care of their aunt. He asks Emma if she can quite manage them, now that she has become a social butterfly, and she responds that she is more than up for the job, even as the elder [Mr. Knightley](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Mr._Knightley) playfully offers to take them off her hands.

Mr. Weston and Mrs. Elton have a long-winded conversation in which they pursue comically different purposes. Mrs. Elton fishes for compliments and goes on about Maple Grove, the estate where her wealthy brother and sister-in-law live. Mr. Weston talks about Frank and explains the illness of Frank’s aunt (and Mr. Weston’s sister-in-law), Mrs. Churchill. Before the conversation becomes too heated, they are interrupted by tea. Mr. John Knightley gives Emma final instructions regarding his sons and wonders if they will be in the way at Hartfield, now that Emma has become so social. She rejects John Knightley’s implication and insists that she is more of a homebody than Mr. (George) Knightley, who seems pleased and amused by the assertion.

***Analysis:***

The narrator seems to like Mrs. Elton less as the story progresses, and she becomes an almost insufferable character. Most of the party seems to want to avoid her.

As the visit of Mr. Churchill is announced, it is interesting to see how Mrs. Elton attempts to place herself firmly in Highbury society and the reader learns that she is not short of self-esteem.

***Analysis(ch34-36):***

Austen’s use of three chapters to narrate a single dinner party marks an interesting narrative development for English literature. In novels by previous writers, the description of the events of a dinner party would have taken up at most a page or two, but Austen turns the dinner party into an opportunity to trace extensively the ins and outs of human personality and interaction. In doing so, she provides a model for later writers as disparate as Henry James and Virginia Woolf.

During the dinner party, we are given our first extended view of Jane Fairfax, who begins to come out of her reserved shell and speak more. Her well-crafted comments exemplify an ideal balance between openness and propriety. For example, when Mr. John Knightley observes, “When you have lived to my age, you will begin to think letters are never worth going through the rain for,” Jane answers, “I must not hope to be ever situated as you are, in the midst of every dearest connection, and therefore I cannot expect that simply growing older should make me indifferent about letters.” This answer is politely vague but also expresses real emotion. It engages our pity, but it tactfully avoids any suggestion of self-pity on Jane’s part. Furthermore, when she firmly resists Mrs. Elton’s aggressive offers of assistance, we realize that Jane’s quietness and reserve do not indicate that she is dull or passive—she clearly has a mind of her own. In fact, Jane is the character who voices the novel’s most explicit social protest, which seems to come directly from Austen herself. Jane speaks against the “governess-trade,” which involves “the sale, not quite of human flesh, but of human intellect.” She admits that offices that advertise for governess positions are less morally deplorable than slave traders, but she adds, “[B]ut as to the greater misery of the victims, I do not know where it lies.”

Our experience of the dinner party is also enlivened by Austen’s depiction of the absurdity that often characterizes forced social dialogue. The conversation between Mrs. Elton and Mr. Weston is full of ridiculous, discontinuous shifts of topic. Mrs. Elton continually turns the conversation to the topic of herself and her relations, and Mr. Weston is every bit as determined to turn the conversation back to his son, at one point jumping in when Mrs. Elton is interrupted by a coughing fit. Mrs. Elton’s affected airs are completely lost on Mr. Weston—when she protests that her sister is “no fine lady,” she means that her sister is not overly fussy, but Mr. Weston takes her quite literally. Mrs. Elton’s affected speech and her tactic of fishing for compliments reinforces our sense of her superficiality, while Mr. Weston’s remarks suggest that there is something a little automatic and absentminded in his perpetual sociability.

***Detailed Summary:***

[Mr. Weston](https://www.gradesaver.com/emma/study-guide/character-list#mr-weston) discusses [Frank Churchill](https://www.gradesaver.com/emma/study-guide/character-list#frank-churchill) and his aunt with Mrs. Elton and reveals more about the Churchill family. They are proud people and, while his pride is harmless, her pride manifests as arrogance and insolence, even though she has no great familial connections. [Mr. John Knightley](https://www.gradesaver.com/emma/study-guide/character-list#mr-john-knightley) leaves his sons, Henry and John, to stay with Emma, although he worries that they will be a burden to her, considering her increasing social life. He notes that Emma has been more social in the past six months and spends time with more different people. Mr. Knightley suggests that the children stay with him instead, but Emma reminds him that he has as many social functions as she does, for they attend the same ones, and that she is never absent from her estate.

 Just as Mr. John Knightley serves as the voice of things that one cannot properly say in Emma, Mrs. Elton serves as the voice for questions that normally would be too rude to ask. Through her persistent questioning about Frank Churchill, we learn more about the ill feelings that Mr. Weston has toward the Churchill family. Mrs. Elton even makes the comparison between Mrs. Suckling (her low-born relative in Maple Grove) and Mrs. Churchill, which is apt considering they are both somewhat low-born but exert influence through 'new' money.

Mr. John Knightley indicates that Emma cares too much for social functions and amusements. Although this fits with his dour character, it nevertheless wounds Emma's pride, for her brother-in-law has suggested that her social activity takes precedence over her family. Mr. Knightley made a similar criticism about Frank Churchill, which foreshadows his later concerns about Frank Churchill's influence over Emma.

Mr. Weston thinks that it’s only polite to tell Mrs. Elton how pleased he will be to introduce her to Frank.

Mrs. Elton immediately assumes that Mr. Weston is paying her a special compliment. (Probably because she’s the most important woman she knows.)

Mr. Weston declares that Frank’s aunt is a "fine lady."

Not willing to be outdone, Mrs. Elton asserts that her sister is also a fine lady.

It becomes clear that Mr. Weston didn’t mean his comment to be a compliment.

Mrs. Elton’s in a pickle: she wants Mr. Weston to admire her sister, but she doesn’t want her to be the same sort of fine lady as Mrs. Churchill.

She does some fancy back-pedaling.

Luckily, Mr. Weston’s attention span isn’t too good. He’s forgotten all about their conversation within seconds.

Mr. Weston and Mrs. Elton begin to have a battle of the tongues:

He talks for awhile about Frank and the Churchills.

She replies by talking for awhile about her sister and Maple Grove.

He responds with an answer about Frank. She talks about her sister. It’s almost like two monologues going on side-by-side.

Emma sends for tea. Several members of the party play cards.

Emma is left to talk to her brother-in-law, Mr. John Knightley.

Mr. John Knightley usually hates dinner parties. Also, he’s a bit of a bear to begin with. Emma’s actually delighted to find that he seems to be in a fairly good mood!

Mr. John Knightley mentions that his two boys (who will be spending the next few weeks with their aunt Emma) can be a bit rowdy.

He offers to take them back whenever they begin to cause trouble.

Observing that Emma seems to have a much more active social calendar than she used to, he smilingly asks her if she’ll have any time at all for the boys.

Mr. Knightley interrupts to say that the boys can come over to his house whenever Emma wishes.

Indignant, Emma refuses to give up any time with her beloved nephews. (It seems that Emma, for all her faults, loves her family very, very much).

The Knightley brothers chuckle over Emma’s ruffled feathers.

***Critical Study(Ch 35 and 36(vol2 ch17-18)):***

When the ladies return to the drawing room after dinner, they make two distinct parties, for Augusta slights Emma and takes Jane aside to discuss finding a situation as governess for her. Jane insists that she does not want to look for a position yet, but Augusta is determined to be of help and rattles on until the men join the ladies. At that moment Mr. Weston, returned from his business trip, joins the party, to the astonishment of John, who cannot understand a man who, after a long day of business, will leave his warm home to come out on a cold, sleety April evening just for socializing. Mr. Weston was expected, of course, but he also has news of Frank, whose letter to Mrs. Weston the husband has opened. That Frank will soon be coming again pleases Mrs. Weston, displeases George and Mr. Woodhouse, and makes Emma weigh her feelings and "the degree of her agitation, which she rather thought was considerable."

Moving on to give the news to Augusta, who has not yet met Frank, Mr. Weston states the details.

Because of Mrs. Churchill's illness, about which he has his doubts, all the Churchills will be coming for a stay in London the very next month and Frank will be able to make the sixteen-mile trip to Highbury quite often. John, who must leave for home early the next morning, turns to Emma to say that she must not spoil his two boys and must send them home if they prove troublesome. When she says that cannot possibly happen, he knowingly mentions her being so "much more engaged with company than you used to be . . . The difference which Randalls, Randalls alone makes in your goings-on, is very great." George cries that the boys can be sent to Donwell, that he has leisure. In reply Emma offers a spirited self-defense against the charge of frequent new social engagements and insists that she is at home much more than George. This is apparently the reaction that George wants, for "Mr. Knightley seemed to be trying not to smile; and succeeded without difficulty, upon Mrs. Elton's beginning to talk to him."

Volume Two now ends, but without an external climax as in Volume One. There is, however, a definite rising, climaxing, and sloughing plot action in Emma's feelings for Frank Churchill, but this is internal and it is not yet entirely resolved. Some mystery has been hinted in regard to Jane and to Frank, but it is not really yet developed — much less resolved — and it serves primarily to underscore the further probability of Emma's self-deception. Augusta is introduced as a new conflictive element for Emma, one from which she may subconsciously learn something of herself; in fact, the brash and willful Augusta is one of Miss Austen's most subtle plot elements, for the author never has Emma directly confront herself with the Augusta in herself — Augusta is a negative force helping almost unperceived toward a positive end.

More specifically, in these concluding chapters Augusta is the butt of immediate satire. She is blithely unaware that she strikes herself when she says that "modern ease often disgusts me," and she creates a reader's delight when, in talking with Mr. Weston about her sister, she realizes that she has caught herself in her own cross fire of coy modesty and proud pretensions.

Since John's two sons enter these final chapters of Volume Two, it is perhaps worth noting that children and servants are merely in the background throughout the novel. The reader is never made to see them or feel their presence, though when the reader looks very closely, servants in particular are in abundance. One reason is that in this society servants (even one for the poor Bateses) and perhaps children are taken for granted. Another is that the satire of the novel is based, not upon general realism, but upon social realism as found in a provincial community where servants and children do not figure socially. Servants and children will conform to their predictable natures, but only the adult socialites have the freedom and wherewithal to create or inherit a code of manners and to let their conformities and aberrations be measured by that code.

Once again in rounding out a volume, Miss Austen points toward Frank Churchill and his imminent presence in Highbury. Also once again her concluding scene involves a kind of cross-purpose relationship between Emma and George.

***Critical Analysis(ch34-36 OR Vol2Ch16-18)):***

These chapters on Emma's dinner party for the Eltons provide another view of [Jane Fairfax](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Emma/character-analysis/#Jane_Fairfax) and Mr. Weston, as well as more comic relief with the antics of Mrs. Elton. Jane has clearly been suffering from separation from a loved one, and when John Knightley gently questions her about her reasons for going out in the rain to fetch the mail, her eyes well up with tears. Jane shows her strength of character when she vigorously rebuffs Mrs. Elton twice—once when she insists that she will collect her own letters, and a second time when she stresses that she is not ready to look for a job yet. But Jane also shows her bitterness about her fate, comparing the governess trade to the slave trade. Although she is secretly engaged to Frank, she doesn't know whether they will ever be able to marry. Like other middle-class women, she considers having to teach other people's children in other people's homes a kind of purgatory. Governesses had no real place in society, as they were neither part of the family nor accepted by the servants. They had no job security and often had to move from job to job as children grew up.

Mr. Weston is overjoyed that his son is coming back, but he expresses a deep resentment of Mrs. Churchill, whom he feels does her best to keep his son away from him. He says she is a snob and an upstart, which might be true, but to some degree he values the things she values. Perhaps if he himself had not been so anxious to raise his status in society, he would have held onto his child and made the best of a difficult situation. Both he and Frank would have suffered financially if he had made that choice, but at least they would have been together. The reader can't help but wonder if a lot of Mr. Weston's pride in Frank stems from the fact that Frank has become a gentleman of a higher class than his father, which is entirely a result of his adoption by the Churchills. Mr. Weston may have, in essence, gotten what he asked for.

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

***Summary part 1:***

[Mr. Weston](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) delightedly engages [Mrs. Elton](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) in conversation, chatting about his son [Frank](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/frank-churchill) and the difficult [Mrs. Churchill](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters). Mrs. Elton proclaims herself a defender of her sex, and she introduces the subject of her own female relations and justifies the fussiness of fine ladies. Mrs. Elton actively fishes for compliments, while Mr. Weston indulges in talking about Frank. When Mr. Weston complains that Mrs. Churchill, for all her pride, was nobody until she married well, Mrs. Elton shudders with horror at such “upstarts”—she is disgusted with people of low connections who give themselves airs.

***Analysis part 1:***

Mr. Weston and Mrs. Elton’s dialogue is comical, as the two continue talking past each other about themselves. Austen here pokes fun at the self-absorption of human nature, as the two characters use each other to indulge in their various prides: Mrs. Elton’s social connection and Mr. Weston’s son. Ironically, Mrs. Elton’s disgust at social upstarts precisely mirrors Emma’s own sentiment towards her; Emma views Mrs. Elton as having an irritatingly inflated view of her own social connections.

***Summary part 2:***

The two are interrupted by tea. [Mr. John Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters) instructs [Emma](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/emma-woodhouse) regarding his sons, who are staying at Hartfield for a little while. He observes that Emma has become much more social, and [Mr. Knightley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/emma/characters/mr-george-knightley) proposes that he will take care of his brother's children instead. Emma objects that she has far more leisure than Mr. Knightley, who is constantly managing his estate.

***Analysis part 2***

Emma’s busy-ness stems from her active social life, the result of a privileged life and sociable nature that keeps her from boredom. However, as Emma herself argues, she has much more leisure as a gentlewoman than Mr. Knightley, who, in addition to meeting social obligations, additionally has to take care of business. Such as the difference between the roles of men and women in Austen's time.