

17. February 8, 2021

Emily warmly invites Barbara into her home after Barbara, adorned in red attire, seeks a favor related to the writing program. Attracted by Emily's well-appointed kitchen and the offer of a special tea blend, Barbara, a coffee aficionado, accepts the tea to maintain goodwill. They discuss Barbara's admiration for the poet Olivia Kingsbury and her wish for Kingsbury to mentor her. Emily, though outwardly supportive, internally expresses reservations about Kingsbury's condition and her own feelings towards Barbara's request.

Emily challenges Barbara to share one of her poems for critique. Barbara selects "Faces Change," a poem reflecting a harrowing experience. Emily critiques the poem in a private analysis, suggesting minor adjustments, and offers to connect Barbara with Kingsbury, implying Barbara's talent. The interaction reveals Emily's complex nature; she toggles between encouragement and internal skepticism, reflecting on generational and racial biases that she acknowledges but does not voice out loud.

The chapter concludes with Emily showing her husband, Roddy, a video capturing Barbara discreetly discarding the tea and taking a cookie, a moment which they find amusing. Emily explains her motive for giving Barbara the stale tea was out of curiosity, showcasing a playful yet somewhat manipulative aspect of her personality. This interaction underscores themes of mentorship, artistic aspiration, and the underlying complexities within human relationships, hinting at Emily's multifaceted character that blends warmth with an analytical and calculating mind.