

Persuasion



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Helen Fielding

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Philippa Gregory

“Jane Austen was writing about boring people with desperately limited lives... Yet she writes about these humdrum lives with such empathy that they seem endlessly fascinating.”

Mark Haddon

“The poet should kick out every line that isn’t as Jane Austen would have written it in prose.”

Ezra Pound

“As a creative realist, giving to her characters the very body and pressure of actual life, no writer, living or dead, has surpassed her.”

John Cowper Powys

ONEWORLD CLASSICS

Persuasion

Jane Austen



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Jane Austen (1775–1817)



Revd George Austen,
Jane's father



Revd James Austen,
Jane's brother



Comtesse Eliza de Feuillide,
Jane's cousin



Revd Henry Austen,
Jane's brother

Persuasion

1

SIR WALTER ELLIOT, OF KELLYNCH HALL in Somersetshire, was a man who for his own amusement never took up any book but the Baronetage:* there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one; there his faculties were roused into admiration and respect by contemplating the limited remnant of the earliest patents; there any unwelcome sensations arising from domestic affairs changed naturally into pity and contempt, as he turned over the almost endless creations of the last century; and there, if every other leaf were powerless, he could read his own history with an interest which never failed – this was the page at which the favourite volume always opened:

ELLIOT OF KELLYNCH HALL

Walter Elliot, born March 1, 1760, married, July 15, 1784, Elizabeth, daughter of James Stevenson, Esq. of South Park, in the county of Gloucester; by which lady (who died 1801) he has issue Elizabeth, born June 1, 1785; Anne, born 9th August 1787; a still-born son, Nov. 5, 1789; Mary, born Nov. 20, 1791.

Precisely such had the paragraph originally stood from the printer's hands, but Sir Walter had improved it by adding, for the information of himself and his family, these words, after the date of Mary's birth: "married, Dec. 16, 1810, Charles, son and heir of Charles Musgrove, Esq. of Uppercross, in the county of Somerset", and by inserting most accurately the day of the month on which he had lost his wife.

Then followed the history and rise of the ancient and respectable family in the usual terms: how it had been first settled in Cheshire; how mentioned in Dugdale* – serving the office of high sheriff, representing a borough in three successive parliaments, exertions of loyalty and dignity of baronet, in the first year of Charles II, with

all the Marys and Elizabeths they had married; forming altogether two handsome duodecimo pages, and concluding with the arms and motto: "Principal seat, Kellynch Hall in the county of Somerset", and Sir Walter's handwriting again in this finale:

Heir presumptive, William Walter Elliot, Esq., great-grandson of the second Sir Walter.

Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character – vanity of person and of situation. He had been remarkably handsome in his youth and, at fifty-four, was still a very fine man. Few women could think more of their personal appearance than he did; nor could the valet of any new-made lord be more delighted with the place he held in society. He considered the blessing of beauty as inferior only to the blessing of a baronetcy, and the Sir Walter Elliot who united these gifts was the constant object of his warmest respect and devotion.

His good looks and his rank had one fair claim on his attachment, since to them he must have owed a wife of very superior character to anything deserved by his own. Lady Elliot had been an excellent woman, sensible and amiable, whose judgement and conduct, if they might be pardoned the youthful infatuation which made her Lady Elliot, had never required indulgence afterwards. She had humoured, or softened, or concealed his failings, and promoted his real respectability for seventeen years; and though not the very happiest being in the world herself, had found enough in her duties, her friends and her children to attach her to life and make it no matter of indifference to her when she was called on to quit them. Three girls, the two eldest sixteen and fourteen, was an awful legacy for a mother to bequeath – an awful charge rather, to confide to the authority and guidance of a conceited, silly father. She had, however, one very intimate friend, a sensible, deserving woman, who had been brought, by strong attachment to herself, to settle close by her, in the village of Kellynch – and on her kindness and advice Lady Elliot mainly relied for the best help and maintenance of the good principles and instruction which she had been anxiously giving her daughters.

This friend and Sir Walter did not marry, whatever might have been anticipated on that head by their acquaintance. Thirteen years had passed away since Lady Elliot's death, and they were still near

neighbours and intimate friends – and one remained a widower, the other a widow.

That Lady Russell, of steady age and character, and extremely well provided for, should have no thought of a second marriage needs no apology to the public – which is rather apt to be unreasonably discontented when a woman *does* marry again than when she does *not* – but Sir Walter's continuing in singleness requires explanation. Be it known then that Sir Walter, like a good father (having met with one or two private disappointments in very unreasonable applications), prided himself on remaining single for his dear daughters' sake. For one daughter, his eldest, he would really have given up anything, which he had not been very much tempted to do. Elizabeth had succeeded, at sixteen, to all that was possible of her mother's rights and consequence – and being very handsome, and very like himself, her influence had always been great, and they had gone on together most happily. His two other children were of very inferior value. Mary had acquired a little artificial importance by becoming Mrs Charles Musgrove, but Anne, with an elegance of mind and sweetness of character which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding, was nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way – she was only Anne.

To Lady Russell, indeed, she was a most dear and highly valued god-daughter, favourite and friend. Lady Russell loved them all, but it was only in Anne that she could fancy the mother to revive again.

A few years before, Anne Elliot had been a very pretty girl, but her bloom had vanished early, and as, even in its height, her father had found little to admire in her, so totally different were her delicate features and mild dark eyes from his own, there could be nothing in them, now that she was faded and thin, to excite his esteem. He had never indulged much hope – he had now none – of ever reading her name in any other page of his favourite work. All equality of alliance must rest with Elizabeth, for Mary had merely connected herself with an old country family of respectability and large fortune, and had therefore *given* all the honour and received none: Elizabeth would, one day or other, marry suitably.

It sometimes happens that a woman is handsomer at twenty-nine than she was ten years before, and generally speaking, if there has been neither ill health nor anxiety, it is a time of life at which scarcely

any charm is lost. It was so with Elizabeth: still the same handsome Miss Elliot that she had begun to be thirteen years ago, and Sir Walter might be excused therefore in forgetting her age, or at least be deemed only half a fool for thinking himself and Elizabeth as blooming as ever, amidst the wreck of the good looks of everybody else; for he could plainly see how old all the rest of his family and acquaintance were growing. Anne haggard, Mary coarse, every face in the neighbourhood worsting – and the rapid increase of the crow's foot about Lady Russell's temples had long been a distress to him.

Elizabeth did not quite equal her father in personal contentment. Thirteen years had seen her mistress of Kellynch Hall, presiding and directing with a self-possession and decision which could never have given the idea of her being younger than she was. For thirteen years had she been doing the honours, and laying down the domestic law at home, and leading the way to the chaise and four, and walking immediately after Lady Russell out of all the drawing rooms and dining rooms in the country. Thirteen winters' revolving frosts had seen her opening every ball of credit which a scanty neighbourhood afforded; and thirteen springs shown their blossoms, as she travelled up to London with her father for a few weeks annual enjoyment of the great world. She had the remembrance of all this; she had the consciousness of being nine-and-twenty to give her some regrets and some apprehensions. She was fully satisfied of being still quite as handsome as ever, but she felt her approach to the years of danger, and would have rejoiced to be certain of being properly solicited by baronet blood within the next twelvemonth or two. Then might she again take up the book of books with as much enjoyment as in her early youth; but now she liked it not. Always to be presented with the date of her own birth, and see no marriage follow but that of a youngest sister, made the book an evil, and more than once, when her father had left it open on the table near her, had she closed it, with averted eyes, and pushed it away.

She had had a disappointment, moreover, which that book, and especially the history of her own family, must ever present the remembrance of. The heir presumptive, the very William Walter Elliot, Esq., whose rights had been so generously supported by her father, had disappointed her.

She had, while a very young girl, as soon as she had known him to be, in the event of her having no brother, the future baronet, meant to

marry him, and her father had always meant that she should. He had not been known to them as a boy, but soon after Lady Elliot's death, Sir Walter had sought the acquaintance, and though his overtures had not been met with any warmth, he had persevered in seeking it, making allowance for the modest drawing-back of youth, and in one of their spring excursions to London, when Elizabeth was in her first bloom, Mr Elliot had been forced into the introduction.

He was at that time a very young man, just engaged in the study of the law, and Elizabeth found him extremely agreeable, and every plan in his favour was confirmed. He was invited to Kellynch Hall; he was talked of and expected all the rest of the year – but he never came. The following spring he was seen again in town, found equally agreeable, again encouraged, invited and expected, and again he did not come; and the next tidings were that he was married. Instead of pushing his fortune in the line marked out for the heir of the house of Elliot, he had purchased independence by uniting himself to a rich woman of inferior birth.

Sir Walter had resented it. As the head of the house, he felt that he ought to have been consulted, especially after taking the young man so publicly by the hand: for they must have been seen together, he observed, once at Tattersall's,* and twice in the lobby of the House of Commons. His disapprobation was expressed, but apparently very little regarded. Mr Elliot had attempted no apology, and shown himself as unsolicitous of being longer noticed by the family as Sir Walter considered him unworthy of it: all acquaintance between them had ceased.

This very awkward history of Mr Elliot was still, after an interval of several years, felt with anger by Elizabeth, who had liked the man for himself, and still more for being her father's heir, and whose strong family pride could see only in him a proper match for Sir Walter Elliot's eldest daughter. There was not a baronet from A to Z whom her feelings could have so willingly acknowledged as an equal. Yet so miserably had he conducted himself that, though she was at this present time (the summer of 1814) wearing black ribbons for his wife, she could not admit him to be worth thinking of again. The disgrace of his first marriage might perhaps, as there was no reason to suppose it perpetuated by offspring, have been got over, had he not done worse; but he had, as by the accustomed intervention of kind friends

they had been informed, spoken most disrespectfully of them all, most slightly and contemptuously of the very blood he belonged to, and the honours which were hereafter to be his own. This could not be pardoned.

Such were Elizabeth Elliot's sentiments and sensations; such the cares to alloy, the agitations to vary, the sameness and the elegance, the prosperity and the nothingness of her scene of life – such the feelings to give interest to a long, uneventful residence in one country circle, to fill the vacancies which there were no habits of utility abroad, no talents or accomplishments for home to occupy.

But now another occupation and solicitude of mind was beginning to be added to these. Her father was growing distressed for money. She knew that when he now took up the Baronetage, it was to drive the heavy bills of his tradespeople, and the unwelcome hints of Mr Shepherd, his agent, from his thoughts. The Kellynch property was good, but not equal to Sir Walter's apprehension of the state required in its possessor. While Lady Elliot lived, there had been method, moderation and economy, which had just kept him within his income; but with her had died all such right-mindedness, and from that period he had been constantly exceeding it. It had not been possible for him to spend less: he had done nothing but what Sir Walter Elliot was imperiously called on to do; but blameless as he was, he was not only growing dreadfully in debt, but was hearing of it so often that it became vain to attempt concealing it longer, even partially, from his daughter. He had given her some hints of it the last spring in town; he had gone so far even as to say, "Can we retrench? Does it occur to you that there is any one article in which we can retrench?" and Elizabeth, to do her justice, had, in the first ardour of female alarm, set seriously to think what could be done, and had finally proposed these two branches of economy: to cut off some unnecessary charities, and to refrain from new-furnishing the drawing room; to which expedients she afterwards added the happy thought of their taking no present down to Anne, as had been the usual yearly custom. But these measures, however good in themselves, were insufficient for the real extent of the evil, the whole of which Sir Walter found himself obliged to confess to her soon afterwards. Elizabeth had nothing to propose of deeper efficacy. She felt herself ill used and unfortunate, as did her father, and they were neither of them able to devise any means of lessening their expenses

without compromising their dignity or relinquishing their comforts in a way not to be borne.

There was only a small part of his estate that Sir Walter could dispose of; but had every acre been alienable, it would have made no difference. He had condescended to mortgage as far as he had the power, but he would never condescend to sell. No – he would never disgrace his name so far. The Kellynch estate should be transmitted whole and entire, as he had received it.

Their two confidential friends – Mr Shepherd, who lived in the neighbouring market town, and Lady Russell – were called on to advise them, and both father and daughter seemed to expect that something should be struck out by one or the other to remove their embarrassments and reduce their expenditure without involving the loss of any indulgence of taste or pride.

2

MR SHEPHERD, A CIVIL, CAUTIOUS LAWYER, who, whatever might be his hold or his views on Sir Walter, would rather have the disagreeable prompted by anybody else, excused himself from offering the slightest hint, and only begged leave to recommend an implicit reference to the excellent judgement of Lady Russell – from whose known good sense he fully expected to have just such resolute measures advised as he meant to see finally adopted.

Lady Russell was most anxiously zealous on the subject, and gave it much serious consideration. She was a woman rather of sound than of quick abilities, whose difficulties in coming to any decision in this instance were great, from the opposition of two leading principles. She was of strict integrity herself, with a delicate sense of honour, but she was as desirous of saving Sir Walter's feelings, as solicitous for the credit of the family, as aristocratic in her ideas of what was due to them, as anybody of sense and honesty could well be. She was a benevolent, charitable, good woman, and capable of strong attachments, most correct in her conduct, strict in her notions of decorum and with manners that were held a standard of good breeding. She had a cultivated mind, and was, generally speaking, rational and consistent – but she had prejudices on the side of ancestry; she had a value for rank and

consequence which blinded her a little to the faults of those who possessed them. Herself the widow of only a knight, she gave the dignity of a baronet all its due, and Sir Walter, independent of his claims as an old acquaintance, an attentive neighbour, an obliging landlord, the husband of her very dear friend, the father of Anne and her sisters, was, as being Sir Walter, in her apprehension entitled to a great deal of compassion and consideration under his present difficulties.

They must retrench – that did not admit of a doubt. But she was very anxious to have it done with the least possible pain to him and Elizabeth. She drew up plans of economy, she made exact calculations, and she did what nobody else thought of doing – she consulted Anne, who never seemed considered by the others as having any interest in the question. She consulted, and in a degree was influenced by her in marking out the scheme of retrenchment, which was at last submitted to Sir Walter. Every emendation of Anne’s had been on the side of honesty against importance. She wanted more vigorous measures, a more complete reformation, a quicker release from debt, a much higher tone of indifference for everything but justice and equity.

“If we can persuade your father to all this,” said Lady Russell, looking over her paper, “much may be done. If he will adopt these regulations, in seven years he will be clear – and I hope we may be able to convince him and Elizabeth that Kellynch Hall has a respectability in itself which cannot be affected by these reductions, and that the true dignity of Sir Walter Elliot will be very far from lessened in the eyes of sensible people by his acting like a man of principle. What will he be doing, in fact, but what very many of our first families have done, or ought to do? There will be nothing singular in his case, and it is singularity which often makes the worst part of our suffering, as it always does of our conduct. I have great hope of our prevailing. We must be serious and decided – for, after all, the person who has contracted debts must pay them, and though a great deal is due to the feelings of the gentleman, and the head of a house, like your father, there is still more due to the character of an honest man.”

This was the principle on which Anne wanted her father to be proceeding, his friends to be urging him. She considered it as an act of indispensable duty to clear away the claims of creditors with all the expedition which the most comprehensive retrenchments could secure, and saw no dignity in anything short of it. She wanted it to be

prescribed and felt as a duty. She rated Lady Russell's influence highly and, as to the severe degree of self-denial which her own conscience prompted, she believed there might be little more difficulty in persuading them to a complete than to half a reformation. Her knowledge of her father and Elizabeth inclined her to think that the sacrifice of one pair of horses would be hardly less painful than of both, and so on, through the whole list of Lady Russell's too gentle reductions.

How Anne's more rigid requisitions might have been taken is of little consequence. Lady Russell's had no success at all – could not be put up with – were not to be borne. "What! Every comfort of life knocked off! Journeys, London, servants, horses, table – contractions and restrictions everywhere. To live no longer with the decencies even of a private gentleman!" No, he would sooner quit Kellynch Hall at once than remain in it on such disgraceful terms.

"Quit Kellynch Hall." The hint was immediately taken up by Mr Shepherd, whose interest was involved in the reality of Sir Walter's retrenching, and who was perfectly persuaded that nothing would be done without a change of abode. Since the idea had been started in the very quarter which ought to dictate, he had no scruple – he said – in confessing his judgement to be entirely on that side. It did not appear to him that Sir Walter could materially alter his style of living in a house which had such a character of hospitality and ancient dignity to support. In any other place, Sir Walter might judge for himself, and would be looked up to, as regulating the modes of life, in whatever way he might choose to model his household.

Sir Walter would quit Kellynch Hall, and after a very few days more of doubt and indecision, the great question of whether he should go was settled, and the first outline of this important change made out.

There had been three alternatives – London, Bath or another house in the country. All Anne's wishes had been for the latter. A small house in their own neighbourhood, where they might still have Lady Russell's society, still be near Mary, and still have the pleasure of sometimes seeing the lawns and groves of Kellynch, was the object of her ambition. But the usual fate of Anne attended her in having something very opposite from her inclination fixed on. She disliked Bath, and did not think it agreed with her – and Bath was to be her home.

Sir Walter had at first thought more of London, but Mr Shepherd felt that he could not be trusted in London, and had been skilful

enough to dissuade him from it, and make Bath preferred. It was a much safer place for a gentleman in his predicament – he might there be important at comparatively little expense. Two material advantages of Bath over London had of course been given all their weight – its more convenient distance from Kellynch – only fifty miles – and Lady Russell’s spending some part of every winter there, and to the very great satisfaction of Lady Russell, whose first views on the projected change had been for Bath, Sir Walter and Elizabeth were induced to believe that they should lose neither consequence nor enjoyment by settling there.

Lady Russell felt obliged to oppose her dear Anne’s known wishes. It would be too much to expect Sir Walter to descend into a small house in his own neighbourhood. Anne herself would have found the mortifications of it more than she foresaw, and to Sir Walter’s feelings they must have been dreadful. And with regard to Anne’s dislike of Bath, she considered it as a prejudice and mistake, arising first from the circumstance of her having been three years at school there after her mother’s death, and secondly from her happening to be not in perfectly good spirits the only winter which she had afterwards spent there with herself.

Lady Russell was fond of Bath in short, and disposed to think it must suit them all – and as to her young friend’s health, by passing all the warm months with her at Kellynch Lodge, every danger would be avoided, and it was, in fact, a change which must do both health and spirits good. Anne had been too little from home, too little seen. Her spirits were not high. A larger society would improve them. She wanted her to be more known.

The undesirableness of any other house in the same neighbourhood for Sir Walter was certainly much strengthened by one part, and a very material part of the scheme, which had been happily engrafted on the beginning. He was not only to quit his home, but to see it in the hands of others – a trial of fortitude which stronger heads than Sir Walter’s have found too much. Kellynch Hall was to be let. This, however, was a profound secret, not to be breathed beyond their own circle.

Sir Walter could not have borne the degradation of being known to design letting his house. Mr Shepherd had once mentioned the word “advertise”, but never dared approach it again; Sir Walter spurned the idea of its being offered in any manner, forbade the slightest hint

being dropped of his having such an intention, and it was only on the supposition of his being spontaneously solicited by some most unexceptionable applicant, on his own terms, and as a great favour, that he would let it at all.

How quick come the reasons for approving what we like! Lady Russell had another excellent one at hand for being extremely glad that Sir Walter and his family were to remove from the country. Elizabeth had been lately forming an intimacy which she wished to see interrupted. It was with a daughter of Mr Shepherd who had returned, after an unprosperous marriage, to her father's house, with the additional burden of two children. She was a clever young woman, who understood the art of pleasing – the art of pleasing, at least, at Kellynch Hall – and who had made herself so acceptable to Miss Elliot as to have been already staying there more than once, in spite of all that Lady Russell, who thought it a friendship quite out of place, could hint of caution and reserve.

Lady Russell indeed had scarcely any influence with Elizabeth, and seemed to love her rather because she would love her than because Elizabeth deserved it. She had never received from her more than outward attention, nothing beyond the observances of complaisance, had never succeeded in any point which she wanted to carry against previous inclination. She had been repeatedly very earnest in trying to get Anne included in the visit to London, sensibly open to all the injustice and all the discredit of the selfish arrangements which shut her out, and on many lesser occasions had endeavoured to give Elizabeth the advantage of her own better judgement and experience – but always in vain; Elizabeth would go her own way – and never had she pursued it in more decided opposition to Lady Russell than in this selection of Mrs Clay, turning from the society of so deserving a sister to bestow her affection and confidence on one who ought to have been nothing to her but the object of distant civility.

From situation, Mrs Clay was, in Lady Russell's estimate, a very unequal, and in her character she believed a very dangerous companion – and a removal that would leave Mrs Clay behind, and bring a choice of more suitable intimates within Miss Elliot's reach, was therefore an object of first-rate importance.

3

“I MUST TAKE LEAVE TO OBSERVE, Sir Walter,” said Mr Shepherd one morning at Kellynch, as he laid down the newspaper, “that the present juncture is much in our favour. This peace will be turning all our rich navy officers ashore. They will be all wanting a home. Could not be a better time, Sir Walter, for having a choice of tenants, very responsible tenants. Many a noble fortune has been made during the war. If a rich Admiral were to come in our way, Sir Walter...”

“He would be a very lucky man, Shepherd,” replied Sir Walter, “that’s all I have to remark. A prize indeed would Kellynch Hall be to him – rather the greatest prize of all, let him have taken ever so many before – hey, Shepherd?”

Mr Shepherd laughed, as he knew he must, at this wit, and then added:

“I presume to observe, Sir Walter, that, in the way of business, gentlemen of the navy are well to deal with. I have had a little knowledge of their methods of doing business, and I am free to confess that they have very liberal notions, and are as likely to make desirable tenants as any set of people one should meet with. Therefore, Sir Walter, what I would take leave to suggest is that, if in consequence of any rumours getting abroad of your intention – which must be contemplated as a possible thing, because we know how difficult it is to keep the actions and designs of one part of the world from the notice and curiosity of the other – consequence has its tax. I, John Shepherd, might conceal any family matters that I chose, for nobody would think it worth their while to observe me, but Sir Walter Elliot has eyes upon him which it may be very difficult to elude. And therefore thus much I venture upon: that it will not greatly surprise me if, with all our caution, some rumour of the truth should get abroad – in the supposition of which, as I was going to observe, since applications will unquestionably follow, I should think any from our wealthy naval commanders particularly worth attending to, and beg leave to add that two hours will bring me over at any time to save you the trouble of replying.”

Sir Walter only nodded. But soon afterwards, rising and pacing the room, he observed sarcastically:

“There are few among the gentlemen of the navy, I imagine, who would not be surprised to find themselves in a house of this description.”

“They would look around them, no doubt, and bless their good fortune,” said Mrs Clay, for Mrs Clay was present; her father had driven her over, nothing being of so much use to Mrs Clay’s health as a drive to Kellynch. “But I quite agree with my father in thinking a sailor might be a very desirable tenant. I have known a good deal of the profession, and besides their liberality, they are so neat and careful in all their ways! These valuable pictures of yours, Sir Walter, if you chose to leave them, would be perfectly safe. Everything in and about the house would be taken such excellent care of! The gardens and shrubberies would be kept in almost as high order as they are now. You need not be afraid, Miss Elliot, of your own sweet flower garden’s being neglected.”

“As to all that,” rejoined Sir Walter coolly, “supposing I were induced to let my house, I have by no means made up my mind as to the privileges to be annexed to it. I am not particularly disposed to favour a tenant. The park would be open to him of course, and few navy officers, or men of any other description, can have had such a range – but what restrictions I might impose on the use of the pleasure grounds is another thing. I am not fond of the idea of my shrubberies being always approachable, and I should recommend Miss Elliot to be on her guard with respect to her flower garden. I am very little disposed to grant a tenant of Kellynch Hall any extraordinary favour, I assure you, be he sailor or soldier.”

After a short pause, Mr Shepherd presumed to say:

“In all these cases, there are established usages which make everything plain and easy between landlord and tenant. Your interest, Sir Walter, is in pretty safe hands. Depend upon me for taking care that no tenant has more than his just rights. I venture to hint that Sir Walter Elliot cannot be half so jealous for his own as John Shepherd will be for him.”

Here Anne spoke:

“The navy, I think, who have done so much for us, have at least an equal claim with any other set of men for all the comforts and all the privileges which any home can give. Sailors work hard enough for their comforts, we must all allow.”

“Very true, very true. What Miss Anne says is very true,” was Mr Shepherd’s rejoinder, and “Oh! certainly,” was his daughter’s; but Sir Walter’s remark was soon afterwards:

“The profession has its utility, but I should be sorry to see any friend of mine belonging to it.”

“Indeed!” was the reply, and with a look of surprise.

“Yes – it is in two points offensive to me; I have two strong grounds of objection to it. First, as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of; and secondly, as it cuts up a man’s youth and vigour most horribly: a sailor grows old sooner than any other man – I have observed it all my life. A man is in greater danger in the navy of being insulted by the rise of one whose father his father might have disdained to speak to, and of becoming prematurely an object of disgust himself, than in any other line. One day last spring, in town, I was in company with two men – striking instances of what I am talking of – Lord St Ives, whose father we all know to have been a country curate without bread to eat. I was to give place to Lord St Ives and a certain Admiral Baldwin, the most deplorable-looking personage you can imagine, his face the colour of mahogany, rough and rugged to the last degree, all lines and wrinkles, nine grey hairs of a side and nothing but a dab of powder at top. ‘In the name of Heaven, who is that old fellow?’ said I to a friend of mine who was standing near (Sir Basil Morley). ‘Old fellow!’ cried Sir Basil. ‘It is Admiral Baldwin. What do you take his age to be?’ ‘Sixty,’ said I, ‘or perhaps sixty-two.’ ‘Forty,’ replied Sir Basil, ‘forty, and no more.’ Picture to yourselves my amazement; I shall not easily forget Admiral Baldwin. I never saw quite so wretched an example of what a seafaring life can do, but to a degree I know it is the same with them all: they are all knocked about and exposed to every climate, and every weather, till they are not fit to be seen. It is a pity they are not knocked on the head at once, before they reach Admiral Baldwin’s age.”

“Nay, Sir Walter,” cried Mrs Clay, “this is being severe indeed. Have a little mercy on the poor men. We are not all born to be handsome. The sea is no beautifier, certainly; sailors do grow old betimes – I have often observed it – they soon lose the look of youth. But then is not it the same with many other professions – perhaps most other? Soldiers in active service are not at all better off – and even in the quieter professions there is a toil and a labour of the mind, if not of the body, which seldom leaves a man’s looks to the natural effect of

time. The lawyer plods, quite careworn, the physician is up at all hours and travelling in all weather, and even the clergyman” – she stopped a moment to consider what might do for the clergyman – “and even the clergyman, you know, is obliged to go into infected rooms and expose his health and looks to all the injury of a poisonous atmosphere. In fact, as I have long been convinced, though every profession is necessary and honourable in its turn, it is only the lot of those who are not obliged to follow any, who can live in a regular way, in the country, choosing their own hours, following their own pursuits and living on their own property, without the torment of trying for more – it is only their lot, I say, to hold the blessings of health and a good appearance to the utmost – I know no other set of men but what lose something of their personableness when they cease to be quite young.”

It seemed as if Mr Shepherd, in this anxiety to bespeak Sir Walter’s goodwill towards a naval officer as tenant, had been gifted with foresight; for the very first application for the house was from an Admiral Croft, with whom he shortly afterwards fell into company in attending the quarter sessions at Taunton – and indeed he had received a hint of the Admiral from a London correspondent. By the report which he hastened over to Kellynch to make, Admiral Croft was a native of Somersetshire, who, having acquired a very handsome fortune, was wishing to settle in his own country, and had come down to Taunton in order to look at some advertised places in that immediate neighbourhood, which, however, had not suited him; that accidentally hearing – it was just as he had foretold, Mr Shepherd observed, Sir Walter’s concerns could not be kept a secret – accidentally hearing of the possibility of Kellynch Hall being to let, and understanding his (Mr Shepherd’s) connection with the owner, he had introduced himself to him in order to make particular enquiries, and had, in the course of a pretty long conference, expressed as strong an inclination for the place as man who knew it only by description could feel, and given Mr Shepherd, in his explicit account of himself, every proof of his being a most responsible, eligible tenant.

“And who is Admiral Croft?” was Sir Walter’s cold suspicious enquiry.

Mr Shepherd answered for his being of a gentleman’s family, and mentioned a place, and Anne, after the little pause which followed, added:

“He is Rear Admiral of the white.* He was in the Trafalgar action, and has been in the East Indies since – he has been stationed there, I believe, several years.”

“Then I take it for granted,” observed Sir Walter, “that his face is about as orange as the cuffs and capes of my livery.”

Mr Shepherd hastened to assure him that Admiral Croft was a very hale, hearty, well-looking man, a little weather-beaten, to be sure, but not much, and quite the gentleman in all his notions and behaviour, not likely to make the smallest difficulty about terms, only wanted a comfortable home and to get into it as soon as possible, knew he must pay for his convenience, knew what rent a ready-furnished house of that consequence might fetch, should not have been surprised if Sir Walter had asked more, had enquired about the manor, would be glad of the deputation,* certainly, but made no great point of it, said he sometimes took out a gun, but never killed – quite the gentleman.

Mr Shepherd was eloquent on the subject, pointing out all the circumstances of the Admiral’s family which made him peculiarly desirable as a tenant. He was a married man, and without children – the very state to be wished for. A house was never taken good care of, Mr Shepherd observed, without a lady: he did not know whether furniture might not be in danger of suffering as much where there was no lady as where there were many children. A lady without a family was the very best preserver of furniture in the world. He had seen Mrs Croft too; she was at Taunton with the Admiral, and had been present almost all the time they were talking the matter over.

“And a very well-spoken, genteel, shrewd lady she seemed to be,” continued he, “asked more questions about the house and terms and taxes than the Admiral himself, and seemed more conversant with business. And moreover, Sir Walter, I found she was not quite unconnected in this country, any more than her husband; that is to say, she is sister to a gentleman who did live amongst us once – she told me so herself – sister to the gentleman who lived a few years back at Monkford. Bless me! what was his name? At this moment I cannot recollect his name, though I have heard it so lately. Penelope, my dear, can you help me to the name of the gentleman who lived at Monkford – Mrs Croft’s brother?”

But Mrs Clay was talking so eagerly with Miss Elliot that she did not hear the appeal.

“I have no conception whom you can mean, Shepherd – I remember no gentleman resident at Monkford since the time of old Governor Trent.”

“Bless me! How very odd! I shall forget my own name soon, I suppose. A name that I am so very well acquainted with – knew the gentleman so well by sight, seen him a hundred times – came to consult me once, I remember, about a trespass of one of his neighbours – farmer’s man breaking into his orchard: wall torn down, apples stolen, caught in the fact – and afterwards, contrary to my judgement, submitted to an amicable compromise. Very odd indeed!”

After waiting another moment, “You mean Mr Wentworth, I suppose,” said Anne.

Mr Shepherd was all gratitude.

“Wentworth was the very name! Mr Wentworth was the very man. He had the curacy of Monkford, you know, Sir Walter, some time back, for two or three years. Came there about the year ***5, I take it. You remember him, I am sure.”

“Wentworth? Oh! Ay – Mr Wentworth, the curate of Monkford. You misled me by the term *gentleman*. I thought you were speaking of some man of property: Mr Wentworth was nobody, I remember – quite unconnected, nothing to do with the Strafford family. One wonders how the names of many of our nobility become so common.”

As Mr Shepherd perceived that this connection of the Crofts did them no service with Sir Walter, he mentioned it no more, returning, with all his zeal, to dwell on the circumstances more indisputably in their favour – their age, and number, and fortune, the high idea they had formed of Kellynch Hall and extreme solicitude for the advantage of renting it – making it appear as if they ranked nothing beyond the happiness of being the tenants of Sir Walter Elliot: an extraordinary taste, certainly, could they have been supposed in the secret of Sir Walter’s estimate of the dues of a tenant.

It succeeded, however, and though Sir Walter must ever look with an evil eye on anyone intending to inhabit that house, and think them infinitely too well off in being permitted to rent it on the highest terms, he was talked into allowing Mr Shepherd to proceed in the treaty, and authorizing him to wait on Admiral Croft, who still remained at Taunton, and fix a day for the house being seen.

Sir Walter was not very wise, but still he had experience enough of the world to feel that a more unobjectionable tenant, in all essentials, than Admiral Croft bid fair to be, could hardly offer. So far went his understanding, and his vanity supplied a little additional soothing in the Admiral's situation in life, which was just high enough, and not too high. "I have let my house to Admiral Croft" would sound extremely well – very much better than to any mere *Mr* ***; a *Mr* (save perhaps some half dozen in the nation) always needs a note of explanation. An Admiral speaks his own consequence, and at the same time can never make a baronet look small. In all their dealings and intercourse, Sir Walter Elliot must ever have the precedence.

Nothing could be done without a reference to Elizabeth, but her inclination was growing so strong for a removal that she was happy to have it fixed and expedited by a tenant at hand, and not a word to suspend decision was uttered by her.

Mr Shepherd was completely empowered to act, and no sooner had such an end been reached than Anne, who had been a most attentive listener to the whole, left the room to seek the comfort of cool air for her flushed cheeks, and as she walked along a favourite grove, said with a gentle sigh, "A few months more, and *he* perhaps may be walking here."

4

HE WAS NOT MR WENTWORTH, the former curate of Monkford, however suspicious appearances may be, but a Captain Frederick Wentworth – his brother, who, being made commander in consequence of the action off St Domingo,* and not immediately employed, had come into Somersetshire in the summer of 1806, and, having no parent living, found a home for half a year at Monkford. He was at that time a remarkably fine young man, with a great deal of intelligence, spirit and brilliancy – and Anne an extremely pretty girl, with gentleness, modesty, taste and feeling. Half the sum of attraction on either side might have been enough, for he had nothing to do, and she had hardly anybody to love, but the encounter of such lavish recommendations could not fail. They were gradually acquainted and, when acquainted, rapidly and deeply in love. It would be difficult to say which had seen highest perfection in the

other, or which had been the happiest – she in receiving his declarations and proposals, or he in having them accepted.

A short period of exquisite felicity followed, and but a short one. Troubles soon arose. Sir Walter, on being applied to, without actually withholding his consent, or saying it should never be, gave it all the negative of great astonishment, great coldness, great silence and a professed resolution of doing nothing for his daughter. He thought it a very degrading alliance, and Lady Russell, though with more tempered and pardonable pride, received it as a most unfortunate one.

Anne Elliot, with all her claims of birth, beauty and mind, to throw herself away at nineteen – involve herself at nineteen in an engagement with a young man who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence but in the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connections to secure even his further rise in that profession – would be indeed a throwing-away which she grieved to think of! Anne Elliot, so young, known to so few, to be snatched off by a stranger without alliance or fortune – or rather sunk by him into a state of most wearing, anxious, youth-killing dependence! It must not be, if by any fair interference of friendship, any representations from one who had almost a mother's love and mother's rights, it would be prevented.

Captain Wentworth had no fortune. He had been lucky in his profession, but, spending freely what had come freely, had realized nothing. But he was confident that he should soon be rich – full of life and ardour, he knew that he should soon have a ship, and soon be on a station that would lead to everything he wanted. He had always been lucky; he knew he should be so still. Such confidence, powerful in its own warmth and bewitching in the wit which often expressed it, must have been enough for Anne, but Lady Russell saw it very differently. His sanguine temper and fearlessness of mind operated very differently on her. She saw in it but an aggravation of the evil. It only added a dangerous character to himself. He was brilliant, he was headstrong. Lady Russell had little taste for wit, and of anything approaching to imprudence a horror. She deprecated the connection in every light.

Such opposition as these feelings produced was more than Anne could combat. Young and gentle as she was, it might yet have been possible to withstand her father's ill will, though unsoftened by one kind word or look on the part of her sister, but Lady Russell, whom she had always

loved and relied on, could not, with such steadiness of opinion and such tenderness of manner, be continually advising her in vain. She was persuaded to believe the engagement a wrong thing – indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success and not deserving it. But it was not a merely selfish caution under which she acted in putting an end to it. Had she not imagined herself consulting his good even more than her own, she could hardly have given him up. The belief of being prudent, and self-denying principally for *his* advantage, was her chief consolation under the misery of a parting – a final parting – and every consolation was required, for she had to encounter all the additional pain of opinions on his side totally unconvinced and unbending, and of his feeling himself ill used by so forced a relinquishment. He had left the country in consequence.

A few months had seen the beginning and the end of their acquaintance, but not with a few months ended Anne's share of suffering from it. Her attachment and regrets had for a long time clouded every enjoyment of youth, and an early loss of bloom and spirits had been their lasting effect.

More than seven years were gone since this little history of sorrowful interest had reached its close, and time had softened down much, perhaps nearly all of peculiar attachment to him – but she had been too dependent on time alone; no aid had been given in change of place (except in one visit to Bath soon after the rupture), or in any novelty or enlargement of society. No one had ever come within the Kellynch circle who could bear a comparison with Frederick Wentworth, as he stood in her memory. No second attachment, the only thoroughly natural, happy and sufficient cure, at her time of life, had been possible to the nice tone of her mind, the fastidiousness of her taste, in the small limits of the society around them. She had been solicited, when about two-and-twenty, to change her name by the young man who not long afterwards found a more willing mind in her younger sister, and Lady Russell had lamented her refusal; for Charles Musgrove was the eldest son of a man whose landed property and general importance were second, in that country, only to Sir Walter's, and of good character and appearance – and however Lady Russell might have asked yet for something more, while Anne was nineteen, she would have rejoiced to see her at twenty-two so respectably removed from the partialities and injustice of her father's house and settled so permanently near herself. But in this case, Anne had left nothing for advice to do, and though

Lady Russell, as satisfied as ever with her own discretion, never wished the past undone, she began now to have the anxiety which borders on hopelessness for Anne's being tempted by some man of talents and independence to enter a state for which she held her to be peculiarly fitted by her warm affections and domestic habits.

They knew not each other's opinion, either its constancy or its change, on the one leading point of Anne's conduct, for the subject was never alluded to, but Anne, at seven-and-twenty, thought very differently from what she had been made to think at nineteen. She did not blame Lady Russell, she did not blame herself for having been guided by her; but she felt that were any young person in similar circumstances to apply to her for counsel, they would never receive any of such certain immediate wretchedness, such uncertain future good. She was persuaded that under every disadvantage of disapprobation at home and every anxiety attending his profession, all their probable fears, delays and disappointments, she should yet have been a happier woman in maintaining the engagement than she had been in the sacrifice of it – and this she fully believed, had the usual share, had even more than a usual share of all such solitudes and suspense been theirs, without reference to the actual results of their case, which, as it happened, would have bestowed earlier prosperity than could be reasonably calculated on. All his sanguine expectations, all his confidence had been justified. His genius and ardour had seemed to foresee and to command his prosperous path. He had, very soon after their engagement ceased, got employ – and all that he had told her would follow had taken place. He had distinguished himself, and early gained the other step in rank – and must now, by successive captures, have made a handsome fortune. She had only navy lists* and newspapers for her authority, but she could not doubt his being rich – and in favour of his constancy, she had no reason to believe him married.

How eloquent could Anne Elliot have been – how eloquent, at least, were her wishes on the side of early warm attachment, and a cheerful confidence in futurity, against that overanxious caution which seems to insult exertion and distrust Providence! She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learnt romance as she grew older – the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning.

With all these circumstances, recollections and feelings, she could not hear that Captain Wentworth's sister was likely to live at Kellynch,

without a revival of former pain, and many a stroll and many a sigh were necessary to dispel the agitation of the idea. She often told herself it was folly, before she could harden her nerves sufficiently to feel the continual discussion of the Crofts and their business no evil. She was assisted, however, by that perfect indifference and apparent unconsciousness among the only three of her own friends in the secret of the past, which seemed almost to deny any recollection of it. She could do justice to the superiority of Lady Russell's motives in this, over those of her father and Elizabeth; she could honour all the better feelings of her calmness – but the general air of oblivion among them was highly important, from whatever it sprung, and in the event of Admiral Croft's really taking Kellynch Hall, she rejoiced anew over the conviction which had always been most grateful to her, of the past being known to those three only among her connections by whom no syllable, she believed, would ever be whispered, and in the trust that among his, the brother only, with whom he had been residing, had received any information of their short-lived engagement. That brother had been long removed from the country – and being a sensible man, and moreover a single man at the time, she had a fond dependence on no human creature's having heard of it from him.

The sister, Mrs Croft, had then been out of England, accompanying her husband on a foreign station, and her own sister, Mary, had been at school while it all occurred, and never admitted, by the pride of some and the delicacy of others, to the smallest knowledge of it afterwards.

With these supports, she hoped that the acquaintance between herself and the Crofts, which, with Lady Russell still resident in Kellynch and Mary fixed only three miles off, must be anticipated, need not involve any particular awkwardness.

5

ON THE MORNING APPOINTED for Admiral and Mrs Croft's seeing Kellynch Hall, Anne found it most natural to take her almost daily walk to Lady Russell's, and keep out of the way till all was over, when she found it most natural to be sorry that she had missed the opportunity of seeing them.

This meeting of the two parties proved highly satisfactory, and decided the whole business at once. Each lady was previously well disposed for an agreement, and saw nothing therefore but good manners in the other; and with regard to the gentlemen, there was such a hearty good humour, such an open, trusting liberality on the Admiral's side as could not but influence Sir Walter, who had besides been flattered into his very best and most polished behaviour by Mr Shepherd's assurances of his being known by report to the Admiral as a model of good breeding.

The house and grounds and furniture were approved, the Crofts were approved, terms, time, everything and everybody was right – and Mr Shepherd's clerks were set to work without there having been a single preliminary difference to modify of all that "This indenture sheweth".

Sir Walter without hesitation declared the Admiral to be the best-looking sailor he had ever met with, and went so far as to say that, if his own man might have had the arranging of his hair, he should not be ashamed of being seen with him anywhere; and the Admiral, with sympathetic cordiality, observed to his wife, as they drove back through the park, "I thought we should soon come to a deal, my dear, in spite of what they told us at Taunton. The Baronet will never set the Thames on fire, but there seems no harm in him" – reciprocal compliments which would have been esteemed about equal.

The Crofts were to have possession at Michaelmas, and as Sir Walter proposed removing to Bath in the course of the preceding month, there was no time to be lost in making every dependent arrangement.

Lady Russell, convinced that Anne would not be allowed to be of any use, or any importance, in the choice of the house which they were going to secure, was very unwilling to have her hurried away so soon, and wanted to make it possible for her to stay behind till she might convey her to Bath herself after Christmas; but having engagements of her own, which must take her from Kellynch for several weeks, she was unable to give the full invitation she wished, and Anne, though dreading the possible heats of September in all the white glare of Bath, and grieving to forgo all the influence so sweet and so sad of the autumnal months in the country, did not think that, everything considered, she wished to remain. It would be most right, and most wise, and therefore must involve least suffering, to go with the others.