

Persuasion **by Jane Austen, published in 1817**

Summary: It is a truth *almost* universally acknowledged that a single woman over the age of seven and twenty must feel her life would be greatly improved by the addition of even a mediocre husband. Almost, save one Anne Elliot, for whom this held more to be a dictum embraced by others but on the whole untrue to her own experience. Anne, perhaps unlike others in her position, had twice had the option to marry while still in the first bloom of her youth. First, at nineteen, to a man named Frederick Wentworth whom she loved, but persuaded against the match by a concerned confidante, Anne had declined. A few years later, still in pain over this first doomed love, Anne had rejected the proposal of a Charles Musgrove, who would later marry her younger sister and become to Anne a far better brother than he could ever have been a husband.

In the fall of her twenty-seventh year Anne, now too old to seriously consider herself the object of any romantic attentions, again encountered Fred Wentworth, and, against all expectations found the feelings from nearly a decade earlier not entirely frozen. For her part, Anne, cognizant of the pain she had caused, wished for nothing more than goodwill and friendship. As for Wentworth, discerning his true feelings and motivations was a task that perhaps not even he was ready to undertake. For several months, in Anne's presence, Wentworth cultivated a strong attachment to one Louisa Musgrove, who surprised all by marrying another. Not a year later, none was more surprised than Anne to find he had once again communicated his feelings for her.

What if Anne Elliot rejected Wentworth's second proposal, believing him less capable of self-reflection than herself? And what if she remained happy despite her unconventional social status?

Not Persuaded After All **by Fiona Conway, 2023**

Anne was elated, of course, and ready to accept the offer at once. What more could she, plagued by the shallow social climbing of her father and sisters, unable to help even the dearest friends fallen to destitution for lack of her own financial liberty, uncertain for whom she could rely on care in her old age, want? And yet. "I have loved none but you," the words in Fred's letter. How could she read this, seeing what she had seen between himself and Louisa only a few months before? Had he been so callous to his happiness and that of another, as to be pretending at this affection, an

affection which none in their circle had expected until he suggested it? Did he write these words to her flippantly, unthinkingly, desirous only of some pretty turn of phrase by which to convey his current whim? To join her future happiness with one capable of either of these felt to Anne extremely unwise.

Marriage, for one in Anne's position, was not entirely a matter of sentiment. Against her misgivings around Wentworth's ability to know his own mind, she must also weigh practical matters. Access to a home, friends, escape from the unhappiness of her current lodgings, the chance, by influence with her husband, to enact greater goods for those in need than her current funds allowed - all this too was on Anne's mind as she held Wentworth's letter, though she may not have admitted to it aloud. She, who often bore her unhappiness without recourse even to a possibility around which to imagine, can be permitted a few moments of fancy.

And how often, how long, had Anne spent regretting her rejection of Wentworth eight years ago, how many times had she wished to change the choice she had made! Yet, even in the depths of her emotional turmoil, Anne would not pretend to herself that she had been wholly unhappy these last eight years. She had, of course, at first felt heartbreak so keenly that she believed herself unable ever again to admit benevolent feelings to anyone, had harboured entirely unjust anger towards all those not suffering as much as herself, and had additionally believed herself to be suffering more greatly than any other on the planet. But she had healed, had found solace in her quietude at Kellynch, had re-discovered real affection among her friends, if not her kin. A friend, an aunt and sister, one able to be of use to those in need - until now this had been the life Anne imagined for herself and the portrait had not filled her with misery. Indeed, she felt at times a quiet pride in having discovered so much worth loving outside of the marital felicity she might earlier have wanted and expected. A life without Wentworth was not so dire. A life with the writer of this confused and insincere letter writer posed, perhaps, the greater risk to all that Anne valued.

But how was Anne to explain this all to the one she had once wounded? To herself, as well? A letter in answer, an account of all she had felt, still felt, had chosen, this to her felt the most sensible and just course of action. Alone in her room, only ink and paper and a slow-burning candle for company, Anne began to write. The letter to Wentworth was easily enough penned, but she found herself compelled to explore her story further on paper. Positioned as she had been all these years, included yet unobserved, privy to the internal lives of many in her circle, Anne was aware of her

unique vantage for understanding the world she lived in. Anger, amusement, affection, all poured from Anne onto the page as she began to write her story, a story which many might find sad or inexplicable, sentiments which compelled Anne all the more to make her own account for her circumstances while she still had the ability to do so.

She would start, she decided, with her origins, an ironic nod to the preoccupation that meant so much to those in her acquaintance. *Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch Hall ...*