

Summaries of Jane Austen's six novels

5. *PERSUASION*

(Written 1816/17; published posthumously 1818)

Sir Walter Elliot, widower and father of three daughters, Elizabeth, Anne, and Mary, lives in Kellynch Hall, his estate in Somersetshire. Sir Walter shares the unpleasant qualities of vanity and class consciousness with his eldest daughter who has been the mistress of Kellynch Hall for the thirteen years since their mother's death.

Sir Walter decides that he would rather leave his home than to change his lifestyle to deal with his increasing debts. As a result, he determines to find a smaller but comfortable house in Bath and rent out Kellynch Hall. Anne is upset about leaving her home and moving to a city where she thinks she will not know anyone.

When Admiral Croft shows interest in Kellynch Hall, Sir Walter notes his considerable wealth and determines that he and his wife would be suitable tenants. Anne also approves of the couple, especially since several years previously, she had fallen deeply in love with Mrs. Croft's brother, Frederick Wentworth, a young Naval officer. Back then, Wentworth lived at his brother's home near Kellynch Hall and had soon become devoted - and subsequently engaged - to Anne. After Anne had been persuaded by her trusted friend Lady Russell to break off their engagement, a deeply-wounded Wentworth went abroad and Anne gradually sank into an

unacknowledged state of depression, much regretting the decision to reject Wentworth.

Just before the move to Bath, Mary pleads illness and invites her comforting sister Anne to stay with her. While at Mary's, Anne becomes well acquainted with her brother-in-law Charles's parents, and also with the Musgroves' spirited and good-natured daughters, Henrietta and Louisa.

Anne and Wentworth soon encounter one another in this social setting and Wentworth's coldness toward her upsets Anne. He is popular with all the others, however, and it soon becomes apparent to all that Wentworth and Louisa will make a match. Despite this, Anne gains the impression that Wentworth does actually still care about *her* feelings a little, but in nothing like the way that she still cares for him.

Wentworth organizes a trip for all of them to Lyme Regis, to visit his friend Captain Harville. While there, they meet Captain Benwick, who has been mourning the death of his fiancée, Harville's sister. The party takes a walk along a long stone pier at the sea's edge. Louisa demands that Wentworth catch her as she jumps down the steps, but she springs down too quickly to be caught and knocks herself unconscious. Anne copes very well with this emergency, which appears at first to be a matter of life and death. The party later becomes hopeful that if she is given time and cared for without yet undergoing the arduous journey back home, Louisa will eventually make a full recovery.

After Anne moves to Bath, she seeks to renew her friendship with Mrs Smith, a widow in financial difficulties. Anne also becomes friendly with William Elliot, her cousin and the heir to the Elliot estate. A month later, Anne is very pleased to learn that Louisa, while recovering slowly in Lyme Regis, has become engaged to Captain Benwick, thus disqualifying herself as a potential partner for Wentworth! Wentworth soon comes to Bath to visit the Crofts, who have come for a short stay. Anne is once again pleased, this time because she notices that Wentworth seems uncomfortable about Mr. Elliot's attentions towards her. Anne subsequently visits Mrs. Smith who tells her that it was the unscrupulous Mr Elliot who had led her husband into debt.

The next day Anne had a debate with Harville about the difference between men's and women's capacity to feel, both claiming a higher level of loving fidelity in their own sex. As they leave, Wentworth leaves a letter where Anne will discover it. She is profoundly moved to read that he still loves her and that he dares to hope that she might actually love him too. Shortly afterwards, they meet on the street and at last they seize the chance to establish their mutual love for each other. Anne admits that she now has a very different attitude to the persuasive guidance which she had been given concerning Wentworth in the past. Wentworth's professional and social standing have, in the years of their separation, established him as a suitable match for Anne after all. At last Anne can marry the honourable, devoted man whom she has loved for many years.