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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.
The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

Source Text

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Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1

Sir Walter Elliot of Kellynch Hall loved only one book. It was a book about great families, old titles, and noble names. He opened it again and again, and he always turned to the page about his own family first. There he could read his own name, his marriage, the birth of his daughters, and the long history of the Elliots. When he felt bored, the book pleased him. When he felt troubled, it pleased him even more.

Sir Walter was a handsome man, even now, in middle age, and he never forgot that fact. He thought very highly of beauty, but he thought even more highly of a title. In his mind, to be good-looking and to be a baronet were the two best gifts in life. He respected those gifts most of all when they belonged to himself. He could look at his own face and name with a satisfaction that never seemed to end.

His wife had been very different from him. Lady Elliot had been calm, kind, and sensible, and during her life she had covered many of her husband's faults. She had died many years before, leaving three daughters behind her: Elizabeth, Anne, and Mary. After her death, one close friend stayed near the family. This was Lady Russell, a wise and good woman who had loved Lady Elliot deeply and cared greatly for her children. She loved them all, but Anne was dearest to her, because Anne was the most like her mother.

Elizabeth, the eldest daughter, was handsome like her father and valued in much the same way. She had been mistress of Kellynch Hall for years and liked the place, the rank, and the small honors of her daily life. Mary, the youngest, had married Charles Musgrove and lived nearby, and this gave her a little importance in her own eyes. Anne was different from both sisters. She was gentle, thoughtful, and truly good, but in her father's house these qualities meant very little. Her father and Elizabeth did not hate her, but they hardly noticed her. When choices were made, Anne gave way, and everybody expected her to do so.

Sir Walter admired Elizabeth because she was still beautiful at twenty-nine and because he believed she would one day marry well. He had once hoped that a relation named Mr Elliot, the heir to the title, would marry her. Elizabeth had hoped the same. But Mr Elliot had disappointed them all. He had married a rich woman of lower birth, and worse than that, he had later spoken of the Elliot family with contempt. Elizabeth had never forgiven him, and Sir Walter had also taken the insult very seriously. Their pride had been hurt, and they liked to remember the injury.

Yet there was now a trouble greater even than wounded pride. Sir Walter had spent too much money for years. While Lady Elliot had lived, she had kept the household in order, but after her death there had been no real care, no plan, and no restraint. Sir Walter still lived as if his income had no end. Bills came in. Debts grew. Mr Shepherd, his lawyer and agent, had warned him more than once. At last even Elizabeth had to know the truth, because it could no longer be hidden.

One day Sir Walter had said to her, “Can we cut our expenses? Is there anything we can stop buying?” Elizabeth had tried to think seriously. She suggested smaller gifts, fewer acts of charity, and no new furniture for the drawing room. But these were weak answers to a large problem. The debts were much worse than she had guessed, and neither she nor her father could bear any idea that touched their comfort or dignity too closely. They did not want a real cure. They wanted an easy one.

Mr Shepherd did not like to speak plainly, so he pushed the matter toward Lady Russell. Lady Russell understood at once that something serious had to be done. She was honest, careful, and strong-minded, though she too respected rank more than she should have done. Even so, she knew that debts had to be paid. She began to make plans, to count carefully, and to think of every way the family might spend less. Unlike the others, she also asked Anne for her opinion.

Anne’s view was the clearest and the bravest. She did not want small changes that only looked useful. She wanted real cuts, quick action, and full honesty. She believed her father should pay what he owed as soon as possible and live more simply until that was done. Lady Russell, reading over her plan, said, “If your

father agrees to this, much can be done. In seven years he may be free of debt. We must show him that real dignity does not come from display, but from acting like an honest man." Anne agreed, but she privately thought Lady Russell's plan was still too soft.

Sir Walter did not agree at all. He heard of fewer servants, fewer horses, less travel, and a smaller table, and he was offended at once. "What?" he cried. "Take away every comfort? Cut down everything? Live like a private gentleman? No. I would sooner leave Kellynch Hall than stay in it on such terms." Mr Shepherd quickly caught at those words. He said a change of house might indeed be the best answer. In another place, Sir Walter could live more cheaply without seeming to fall so low. After some discussion, three ideas stood before them: London, another small house in the country, or Bath.

Anne hoped for a small house near Kellynch. She wanted to stay near Lady Russell, near Mary, and near the fields and trees she knew so well. But as usual, what Anne wished did not happen. London was judged too dangerous for Sir Walter's spending habits, and Bath was made to seem the perfect answer. It was close enough to Kellynch, full of society, and grand enough for Sir Walter and Elizabeth to feel important. Lady Russell supported the plan, though she knew Anne disliked Bath. She also had another quiet reason for approving the move: Elizabeth had grown too friendly with Mrs Clay, the clever daughter of Mr Shepherd, and Lady Russell believed that friendship was not wise. So the family decided to leave Kellynch Hall, let others live there, and make Bath their new home.

Part 2

One morning Mr Shepherd came again to Kellynch Hall with a new idea. Peace had come after the war, he said, and many rich officers of the navy would now want homes on land. He spoke carefully, but his meaning was plain. If Sir Walter truly meant to leave Kellynch, then this was a very good time to find a strong and respectable tenant.

Sir Walter listened with the calm pride of a man who liked to think that anybody would be lucky to live in his house. Mrs Clay, who was there with her father, quickly agreed that a sailor might be a very good tenant. She said sailors were orderly, practical people, and that the house, the gardens, and even Miss Elliot's flowers would be safe in such hands. Sir Walter answered coolly that, if he let the house at all, he would not be too generous with the rights that came with it. He could not bear the thought that another man might feel too much at home in Kellynch Hall.

Anne then spoke in a quiet but firm voice. She said, "The navy has done so much for us. Those men have a right to comfort when they come home. They work hard enough for it." Sir Walter did not like this at all. He said that the navy was useful, but he would still be sorry to have any friend of his belong to it, because it raised men of low birth too high and made them old and ugly before their time.

He then gave a long and foolish example of an admiral whose face he found ugly and weather-beaten. Mrs Clay tried to soften his words and said that many kinds of work could damage a man's health and appearance. Yet Sir Walter still talked as if the sea itself were a kind of insult to beauty and good family. Anne heard him, but she did not argue further. She knew too well that reason could do little with a man whose pride was stronger than his judgment.

Soon after this, Mr Shepherd returned with real news. An admiral named Croft had heard that Kellynch Hall might be available and was very interested in it. He was from Somersetshire, had made a good fortune in the war, and wanted to settle in his own county. Mr Shepherd praised him warmly. He said Admiral Croft was healthy, open, easy in business, ready to pay well, and married to a sensible woman who asked excellent questions and understood practical matters.

Then came one small fact that changed everything for Anne. Mrs Croft, Mr Shepherd said, was the sister of a man who had once lived at Monkford. He could not remember the name, and no one helped him at first. At last Anne said quietly, "You mean Mr Wentworth, I suppose." Mr Shepherd cried out that this was exactly the name, and Sir Walter at once answered with his usual cold contempt,

saying that Mr Wentworth had been nobody at all.

The moment passed, but not for Anne. Sir Walter and Elizabeth were pleased enough with the match because an admiral sounded grand, and because Admiral Croft was important, but not important enough to overshadow them. Mr Shepherd was allowed to go on with the arrangement, and the matter was almost settled. Anne then left the room and walked outside into the air. As she moved slowly through a favorite part of the grounds, she thought, with a soft pain in her heart, that in a few months he might perhaps be walking there.

The man she meant was not the curate of Monkford, but his brother, Captain Frederick Wentworth. Eight years earlier he had come into the neighborhood as a young naval officer with no parents living and no fixed home for the moment. He had been full of life, intelligence, confidence, and brightness. Anne had then been young, pretty, gentle, and full of feeling. They had met, come to know each other, and then fallen deeply in love in a very short time.

For a little while they had been completely happy. He asked her to marry him, and she accepted him. But trouble came almost at once. Sir Walter did not openly forbid the match, yet his silence, his coldness, and his refusal to help his daughter were plain enough. Lady Russell opposed it too, though in a kinder and more serious way. She believed that Anne, at nineteen, should not tie herself to a man with no fortune, no strong family support, and a profession full of danger and uncertainty.

Captain Wentworth had very little money, but he believed strongly in his future. He said that he would soon have a ship, soon rise higher, and soon make his fortune. Anne believed him because she believed in him. Lady Russell did not. She thought his confidence too bold, his spirit too quick, and his hopes too uncertain. She feared not only poverty, but a long life of anxiety, waiting, and disappointment.

Anne might perhaps have resisted her father’s pride, but she could not easily resist Lady Russell, whom she loved and trusted almost like a mother. Lady Russell spoke to her with steadiness, tenderness, and strong conviction. Little by little Anne was persuaded that the engagement was unwise, unfair to them both,

and not likely to end well. She did not give him up out of selfish fear alone. She truly believed, or tried to believe, that she was doing what would be best for him as well as for herself.

So the engagement ended. To Anne it was a sacrifice made in sorrow and duty. To him it felt like a cruel surrender forced upon her by other people. He was not persuaded, and he did not forgive easily. Soon after that he left the neighborhood. Their happiness had lasted only a short time, but Anne's pain lasted far longer. The loss changed her spirits, dimmed her early beauty, and left a mark that years could not fully remove.

More than seven years had now passed. Time had softened the sharpest pain, but it had not filled the empty place. No other man had ever seemed equal to Frederick Wentworth in Anne's memory. Once, when she was about twenty-two, Charles Musgrove had wished to marry her, but Anne could not accept him. He later married Mary instead. Anne stayed where she was, in the same small circle, living quietly and seeing too little of the world.

At twenty-seven, she no longer judged the past as she had judged it at nineteen. She did not accuse Lady Russell, and she did not entirely accuse herself. But she had learned something painful. If a young woman had come to her now for advice in such a case, Anne would not have urged her to give up the man she loved so quickly. She had been forced into caution when she was young, and now, after long experience, she understood the value of brave and faithful love more deeply than before.

She also knew that Frederick Wentworth's hopes had come true. From newspapers and navy lists she had learned that he had risen in rank and gained prize money. He must now be a rich man, or near it. As far as she knew, he had not married. This knowledge could not give her peace. It only made the past more living, because it showed that his confidence had not been empty and that the future Lady Russell had feared had not been the future that truly came.

For that reason, the Crofts' arrival at Kellynch was not a small matter to Anne. Mrs Croft was his sister. If the Crofts came, his name, his family, and perhaps he himself would return in some form to the place where Anne had once been

happiest and had suffered most. The thought troubled her deeply. She walked, thought, and sighed many times before she could quiet herself enough to hear the Crofts discussed without visible pain.

Yet she had one comfort. Very few people knew the truth of her former engagement. Only Lady Russell, Sir Walter, and Elizabeth knew it on her side, and she trusted that none of them would speak. Mary had been too young and too far away to know anything of it at the time, and Mrs Croft had been out of England. Anne hoped, therefore, that when she met the Crofts, the meeting would be formal and calm. She hoped it, and she tried to believe it, though her heart was not at rest.

Part 3

On the morning when Admiral and Mrs Croft came to see Kellynch Hall, Anne chose to go out for a walk. It seemed easier to stay away while strangers looked at the house that had been her home for so many years. Later, however, she wished she had seen them. The meeting went well from the first moment. Sir Walter was on his best behavior, the Admiral was open and cheerful, and Mrs Croft pleased everybody by her direct and sensible way of speaking. Before long, the house, the furniture, the grounds, the price, and the date were all agreed upon.

Sir Walter soon declared that Admiral Croft was the best-looking sailor he had ever met. The Admiral, in return, told his wife on the drive home that the baronet was not a man of great power, but there seemed to be no harm in him. So both sides were satisfied in their own way. The Crofts were to take possession at Michaelmas, and Sir Walter meant to leave for Bath the month before. Everything now had to be settled quickly. There was no more time for delay.

Lady Russell wished Anne could stay with her until winter and go later to Bath under her care. But Lady Russell herself had to leave Kellynch for some weeks, so the plan could not be managed in the way she wanted. At that moment, Mary solved the question in her usual style. She sent word that she was unwell and said, “I cannot possibly do without Anne.” Elizabeth answered at once, “Then Anne had better stay, because nobody will want her in Bath.” Anne accepted the

decision quietly, because even a poor kind of need was better than none.

The plan seemed settled, but one part of it troubled both Anne and Lady Russell very much. Mrs Clay was not only to remain close to Elizabeth, but to go with Sir Walter and Elizabeth to Bath as a useful companion. Lady Russell disliked this strongly. Anne also saw the danger more clearly than anyone else. She did not think her father was in love with Mrs Clay now, but she knew how much harm could come when vanity, flattery, and constant company worked together day after day. Mrs Clay was not beautiful, but she was clever, careful, and very ready to please.

Anne therefore tried to warn Elizabeth, though she had little hope of success. She said, as gently as she could, that an intimacy of this kind might become unsafe. Elizabeth was offended at once. “Mrs Clay knows exactly who she is,” she said. “And my father has stayed single for our sake for many years. You speak as if there were real danger, and there is none. Poor Mrs Clay is not even pretty enough for such fears.” Anne answered, “There is almost no defect in looks that a pleasant manner cannot make easier to bear.” Elizabeth cut her short and made it clear that advice from Anne was not welcome.

Soon after this, Sir Walter, Elizabeth, and Mrs Clay drove away to Bath in high spirits. Sir Walter was ready with gracious bows for any tenant or villager who might come out to watch him go. Anne, at the same time, walked to Kellynch Lodge to spend a little time with Lady Russell before going on to Uppercross. Both women were sad. Lady Russell felt the break in old habits very deeply, and Anne felt the pain of seeing her home pass into other hands. Before long, Lady Russell left on her journey, and Anne was set down at Uppercross Cottage.

Uppercross was only a few miles away, but to Anne it always felt like a different world. At Kellynch, the concerns of Sir Walter and Elizabeth seemed large enough to fill the whole county. At Uppercross, almost nobody cared where in Bath they would live, what furniture they would take, or how the move would look to others. The Musgroves had their own interests, their own pleasures, and their own noise. There were horses, dogs, children, servants, dinners, neighbors, music, and gossip. Anne saw once again how small one family’s great troubles

may appear outside its own circle.

Mary received her in the manner Anne had expected. She was lying on the sofa and began at once. “So you have come at last,” she said. “I am so ill that I can hardly speak. I have not seen a single person all morning.” Anne answered kindly and tried to remind her that, only a short time before, she had written that she was perfectly well. Mary ignored this and complained about Charles, who had gone out shooting, and about the little boys, who were too noisy to comfort her. Yet after half an hour of Anne’s calm patience, Mary began to improve as she nearly always did.

Before long, Mary was sitting up, then making a small bunch of flowers, then eating, and then saying she might be able to take a walk. Such quick recovery was familiar to Anne, and she met it with quiet good sense. In the days that followed, she saw again what Uppercross life was like. Charles was pleasant and good-humored, though not a man of deep thought. Mary complained of Charles, Charles complained of Mary, and both sides expected Anne to understand and gently take their part. Mr and Mrs Musgrove also trusted her with every small family grievance, so that Anne was often made the listener, the comforter, and the peacemaker all at once.

Still, life at Uppercross was easier for her than life at Kellynch. The children loved her and obeyed her more than they obeyed their mother. The Musgrove family was warm, lively, and natural. The young ladies laughed, talked, sang, and loved dancing. Anne played much better than they did, and though her music was not greatly admired except when it was useful for dancing, she did not mind. She had long been used to playing for herself alone. The cheerful movement of the house, the constant coming and going, and the absence of proud silence all helped her spirits.

Three weeks passed in this way. Then Michaelmas came, and Anne could not help thinking of Kellynch. On that day the Crofts were to enter the house. Mary suddenly cried, “This is the very day they go to Kellynch, is it not? I am glad I did not think of it sooner. It makes me low.” Mary talked much of how hard it would be for her to pay a visit there, but she still arranged to go as soon as possible.

Anne was sincerely glad that she had no need to go with her. She wanted to see the Crofts, but she wanted the meeting to happen quietly and without effort.

Her wish was granted when the Crofts returned the visit at the Cottage. Charles was out, so Anne and Mary received them together. The Admiral sat with Mary and made himself agreeable by laughing with the children, who at once climbed over him and loved him. Anne, meanwhile, talked with Mrs Croft. She saw in her an active, sensible woman, strong in body and mind, open in manner, and perfectly at ease. Most important of all, Anne quickly felt sure that Mrs Croft knew nothing of the past between herself and Captain Wentworth. That gave her courage.

For a moment, however, she was shaken. Mrs Croft said, “It was you, not your sister, who knew my brother when he was in this part of the country, I believe.” Anne felt the old emotion rise at once, but in the next breath Mrs Croft showed that she meant Mr Wentworth, the former curate, now a married man. Anne recovered herself and answered properly. Then, just as the Crofts were leaving, the Admiral began to say to Mary, “We are expecting one of Mrs Croft’s brothers here soon. I dare say you know his name.” At that moment the little boys rushed at him again, and the sentence was broken off.

No one finished it, and no one explained it. Yet the unfinished words were enough. Anne tried to persuade herself that the brother meant must still be the one who had once lived at Monkford. But she could not feel certain. A quiet fear, and something warmer than fear, moved in her heart. She now knew that the calm days at Uppercross could not remain calm much longer.

Part 4

A few days later, everyone at Uppercross knew that Captain Wentworth had arrived at Kellynch. Mr Musgrove called on him and came back full of praise. Before long, Captain Wentworth was invited to dine at the Great House. To Anne, one week had suddenly become a very small thing. A week before, his return had been only an idea. Now it had a date, a place, and a door through which he would walk.

He returned Mr Musgrove's civility quickly, and he almost met Anne much sooner than anyone expected. She and Mary were just setting out for the Great House when little Charles was brought home after a bad fall. The visit had to be given up at once. The child's collar-bone was hurt, his back had also been injured, and for some time no one knew how bad the matter might be. Anne had everything to do. She sent for help, sent for Charles, calmed Mary, managed the servants, kept the younger child away, and stayed with the poor little boy until the apothecary came.

When the worst fear had passed, the Musgroves were able to speak of Captain Wentworth. Louisa and Henrietta came in glowing with excitement. "He is so much handsomer than anyone here," they said. "He speaks so well, and so easily, and with such grace." They told Anne and Mary that he had promised to dine with them the next day. Mr Musgrove himself added his praise, and said he hoped nothing would now prevent the meeting. Anne, still shaken by the child's accident, said warmly that Mary certainly could not leave home.

Charles, however, soon decided otherwise. The boy was better, Anne was there, and a father, as he said, could do very little in such a case. He meant to dress and dine at the Great House. Mary was hurt and angry, but she also wanted to go. She complained that men always escaped unpleasant duties and left mothers behind. Anne listened patiently, and then said, "If you truly wish to go, then go. I will stay with little Charles. He minds me, and I can take care of him." Mary's whole manner changed at once. In a moment she was delighted with the plan and ran to tell her husband.

So Anne was left alone with the child while the others dressed and drove away in high spirits. She felt a real comfort in being useful, and that comfort was stronger than the pain she was trying not to feel. Frederick Wentworth was only a short distance away, making himself agreeable in another house, but she was at least where she was needed. Still, she could not help wondering how he felt. Did he wish to see her? Did he wish to avoid her? If he had truly wanted a meeting, she thought, he might have tried to bring one about long before now.

Charles and Mary came back delighted. There had been music, laughter, and

easy conversation. Captain Wentworth had pleased everyone, and he was coming again the next morning to shoot with Charles. He would come by the Cottage for only a few minutes, if it was not inconvenient. Anne understood the arrangement at once. He was willing to pay a proper visit, but not willing to stay longer than politeness required. That knowledge hurt her, though it also made the expected meeting shorter and clearer.

The next morning Charles came in during breakfast and said, “They are almost here. My sisters are coming to see Mary and the child, and Captain Wentworth will call for a few minutes too.” Mary was pleased by this mark of attention. Anne felt a rush of feeling that she could hardly master, but her strongest thought was still, “It will soon be over.” Then they entered. Captain Wentworth bowed, Anne curtseyed, their eyes half met, and he began speaking to Mary in the proper way. He said all that was right, spoke easily to the Miss Musgroves, stayed only a little, and then was gone.

When the room was empty again, Anne sat still and repeated to herself, “It is over. The worst is over.” She had seen him again. They had been in the same room, heard the same voices, breathed the same air. That should have been little, after so many years, and yet it was not little at all. She tried to reason with herself. Nearly eight years had passed. In eight years lives could change completely. Love could die, memory could fade, and what had once seemed everything might become almost nothing. Yet, for feelings that keep their hold too well, eight years can be very little indeed.

From that day, they were often in the same circle. Little Charles improved, so Anne could no longer stay away from dinners and gatherings at the Great House. They met again and again. Captain Wentworth talked freely to others, especially when anyone asked about the navy, and sooner or later the old year had to be named in his stories. He said, “That was in the year six,” or, “That happened before I went to sea in the year six.” His voice did not shake, and he did not look toward Anne, but she was sure the same date must awaken the same memory in him as in herself.

Yet between them there was almost nothing. Once they had found it hard to

stop talking. Now they were strangers, or something even colder than strangers, because strangers may still become friends, while these two had a shared past standing silently between them. Anne heard the same voice and recognized the same quick mind. The young women asked questions about ships, food, rules, weather, and life at sea. He answered with good humor and a little gentle mockery, and his manner reminded Anne painfully of earlier days, when she too had listened, learned, and smiled in the same way.

Mrs Musgrove, full of tender sorrow for her dead son Dick, could not help turning to Anne and saying, “If my poor boy had lived, I believe he would have grown into just such a man.” Anne could hardly keep back a smile, but she listened kindly. Soon Louisa and Henrietta brought out a navy list and began searching for Captain Wentworth’s ships. He took the book from them and read aloud, speaking of the old Asp and then the Laconia. He told them how luck had helped him, how storms had nearly destroyed him, and how fortune had come to him step by step. The girls listened in open delight, and every danger he described only made him more interesting to them.

Mrs Musgrove then spoke of Dick again and said, with feeling, that it had been a happy thing for her son to serve under such a captain. Anne caught a quick look on Captain Wentworth’s face and understood at once that poor Dick had probably been more trouble than comfort to him. Yet in the next moment he moved to Mrs Musgrove with kindness, sat down near her, and spoke so gently that no one could doubt his good breeding or his real wish not to hurt her. Anne saw once more what she had always known: he could feel amusement and compassion at the same time, and when needed, he could command himself perfectly.

The talk later turned to women on board ship. Captain Wentworth said, “I do not like having women on board. It is not that I think little of them. It is because I think they have a right to more comfort than a ship can give.” Mrs Croft attacked him at once. “Frederick, that is nonsense,” she said. “Women are not all delicate ladies. I have lived happily on ships for years.” The Admiral laughed and added, “Wait until you are married. Then you will sing a different tune.” Captain Wentworth answered, “When married people begin with, ‘You will think

differently when you are married,' there is no end to the argument. I can only say, 'No, I shall not.'"

The evening ended in dancing. Anne, as usual, went to the piano and played for the others. She was glad to be employed and more glad still not to be watched too closely. The room was full of life, laughter, movement, and young pleasure. No one seemed happier than Captain Wentworth. Henrietta and Louisa were both so occupied by him that, if they had not remained perfectly good friends with each other, they might have looked like rivals. Even the Hayter girls admired him. Anne felt that admiration was rising around him from every side, and she could not wonder if it pleased him.

More than once she felt his eyes on her, perhaps trying to see in her face what time had changed. More than once she knew he must have spoken of her, though not to her. At last he did speak directly. He had sat down at the instrument for a moment after the dancing, and when Anne came near, he rose at once and said with careful politeness, "I beg your pardon, madam. This is your seat." Anne answered quickly that it was not, but he would not sit down again. She turned away with a full heart. His cold courtesy, his formal grace, and his distance were harder to bear than open dislike would have been.

Part 5

As the days passed, the people at Uppercross began to treat Captain Wentworth's attention to the two Miss Musgroves almost like a game. Mary was certain that he liked Henrietta best. Charles insisted just as strongly that Louisa had the advantage. They argued over every look, every visit, and every word. Anne listened, but she did not care much which sister he might prefer, as long as he did not go on in a way that could hurt either of them.

Henrietta had once seemed likely to marry her cousin Charles Hayter, and that made the whole matter less simple than Mary wished. Charles Hayter was a good young man, but Mary looked down on him because his home at Winthrop was plain and his position not high enough for her taste. Charles Musgrove defended

him and said that, when the property became his, he would make a better life there. Mary would not yield. “It would be a shocking match for Henrietta,” she said, and then added, with her usual selfish honesty, “and still worse for me.” Anne could see that vanity was speaking much louder than affection.

Anne herself thought differently. She felt pity for Charles Hayter, because his hopes were clearly in danger, and she thought it would be far better for Henrietta to understand her own heart quickly than to play lightly with the feelings of a man who truly cared for her. At the same time, she could not deny that Captain Wentworth was behaving with a dangerous ease. He was cheerful, admired, and welcome everywhere. A man in such a position could do harm without meaning to, if he did not soon know his own mind.

One day Anne stayed at the Cottage while the others went to dine at the Great House. She had a slight headache, and little Charles was not very well again, so she remained behind. Before long, however, there was company even there. Charles Hayter came, and after him Captain Wentworth. Anne found herself once more in the middle of a room where she wished to be calm and could not be. She had little Charles to attend to, and the younger boy, Walter, soon became a trouble.

Walter was a strong and determined little child, and when he wanted attention, he wanted all of it. Anne was bending over his brother when Walter climbed onto her back and held so tightly around her neck that she could not free herself. She spoke to him, ordered him down, and tried to loosen his hands, but he would not move. Charles Hayter called to him and tried to make him obey, but Walter still held fast. Anne felt tired, embarrassed, and unable to manage even this small struggle in peace.

Then, in a moment, she was relieved. Someone lifted the child away from her so quietly and firmly that she hardly knew what had happened until Walter had already been carried off. It was Captain Wentworth. He had stepped forward without a word, freed her from the child’s grasp, and then, instead of waiting for thanks, began at once to make a little noise and play with the boy, as if he wished to show that he wanted no notice and no conversation. Anne could not speak. She could only remain where she was, full of confused feeling.

That small act touched her more deeply than many greater ones might have done. His kindness had been natural, immediate, and full of the old readiness to help her. Yet there had also been distance in it, because he seemed determined not to let the moment become personal. Anne was so shaken by this mixture of tenderness and restraint that she could not remain in the room. Mary and the Miss Musgroves soon came in, and Anne gave up the child to them and escaped outside to recover herself.

A little later there was a long walk planned into the country, and Anne joined the party. The day was beautiful, full of mild autumn light, and for a time the walk seemed easy and pleasant. But beneath the quiet of the fields and hedges, Anne could feel the same restless movement in the group. Henrietta was thinking of Charles Hayter, and trying not to think of him. Louisa was full of spirit and openly pleased by Captain Wentworth's company. Mary grew tired and began to complain, as she often did when others were enjoying themselves too much.

When they came near Winthrop, the place where Charles Hayter's family lived, Henrietta looked uneasy at once. She knew very well that they were near enough to call, and Charles Musgrove declared that now they had come so far, they must go down and see their aunt. Mary refused strongly. She said she was too tired and would not walk down only to walk up again. After some discussion it was settled that Charles and Henrietta would go for a few minutes, while the others waited above. Louisa seemed glad to arrange it, as if she wanted Henrietta pushed toward a decision, one way or the other.

While they waited, Mary made one of her proud little speeches about disagreeable family connections and said that she herself had hardly ever been inside the house. Captain Wentworth answered only with a polite smile that meant nothing at all. Soon after that, Louisa drew him away to search for nuts in a hedge-row, and they moved slowly out of sight. Mary, who could never bear to think that anyone else might be having a better time than she was, soon became restless again and insisted on changing her seat and looking for them. Anne, tired herself, sat down quietly on a sunny bank and remained still.

From where she sat, she could hear voices behind the hedge before she could

see the speakers. Louisa was talking eagerly. She was saying that she had made Henrietta go on with the visit and would not let her turn back out of weak politeness. “When I have decided on a thing, I have decided,” she said in effect, with all her natural force. “I would not be turned aside by foolish interference.” Captain Wentworth answered with warmth that showed how much he admired such firmness. He said Henrietta was sweet, but Louisa had the stronger character.

Then he went further. He said that in serious matters, happiness depended on decision and steadiness, and that weak people could be changed by anybody who happened to be near them. He picked a nut from the branch above and used it like an example in his hand. This nut, he said, was still whole because it had the strength to survive the storms that had broken the others. “My first wish for all I care about,” he said, “is that they should be firm.” The words were playful on the surface, but their meaning was not light at all.

Louisa did not answer him at once. Anne could easily imagine why. Such praise, spoken with seriousness, was enough to go straight to a young woman’s heart. But Anne heard more than Louisa could hear in the speech. To her, every word seemed to come from an old wound. He was praising strength, because he still remembered what he believed had been weakness in her. He admired Louisa’s spirit because he had once suffered from Anne’s yielding nature.

Anne stayed where she was for a little while longer, scarcely daring to move. The whole scene around her was quiet and lovely, but her thoughts were not quiet. She knew now, more clearly than before, that the past had not died in Frederick Wentworth’s mind. He still carried it with him, and he still judged it in the same way. If there had been any softening in his feelings, it had not yet touched this point. And so the walk ended for Anne not with the peace of the autumn fields, but with the painful certainty that he still remembered her as the woman who had not been firm enough.

Part 6

The little party at Uppercross soon formed a new plan. They would go to Lyme

for two days, see the sea, enjoy a change, and visit Captain Wentworth's friends there. Mary wished to go because everybody else wished it, and Charles wished to go because he always liked movement and society. Louisa and Henrietta were full of joy from the first moment. Anne agreed to join them, though she knew that every new hour in Captain Wentworth's company gave both pleasure and pain.

The journey itself was cheerful. The road was pleasant, the weather was fair, and the younger part of the company found enough amusement in every hill, every turn, and every village. Anne, though quieter than the others, was not untouched by the beauty of the day. She had always loved the sea. The farther they went, the more the thought of Lyme brought a fresh movement into her mind, because the sea, with its wide air and deep sound, seemed larger and freer than the life she had been leading.

When they came near the town, they all looked eagerly around them. Lyme was different from Uppercross in every way. There was less softness and comfort, but more life, more change, and more force. The strong sea air moved over the streets and the harbor. The Cobb rose before them, firm against the water, and the waves struck against it with a sound that was both rough and welcome. Anne felt at once that the place would stay in her memory.

Captain Wentworth was perfectly at home there. He knew where to go, whom to greet, and how everything should be arranged. This easy command, joined to his natural spirit, made him seem even more himself than at Uppercross. Anne could not help seeing it. She also saw that the Musgrove girls admired him more than ever. Lyme, the sea, his naval friends, and the stories connected with all of them seemed to place him in his true world. In that world, he was bright, active, valued, and sure of himself.

They had not been long on the Cobb before two men were seen coming toward them. They were Captain Harville and Captain Benwick, both friends of Captain Wentworth. Anne had heard their names before, but now she saw them for the first time. Captain Harville was a kind-looking man, strong in feeling though not in health, and a little lame. Captain Benwick was younger and gentler in manner, with a pleasing face and a sad expression that suited the loss he had suffered. The

whole meeting was warm on one side and politely received on the other. Captain Wentworth's friends clearly loved him.

Captain Harville and his wife asked the whole party to dine with them at once, with such open kindness that the invitation would have been hard to refuse under any circumstances. Yet dinner had already been ordered at the inn, so the invitation could not be accepted. Even in refusing, however, everybody felt the charm of the Harvilles' welcome. Their wish to treat all friends of Captain Wentworth as their own friends was so natural and so hearty that Anne was deeply moved by it. She thought, not for the first time, that these would once have been her friends too.

Later, they went into the Harvilles' house and found it small, crowded, and full of comfort. Nothing there had been arranged for show. Everything had been arranged for use, affection, and daily life. Captain Harville had clearly spent much thought and skill in making the little place easy for his family. There were shelves, tools, useful objects, and small beautiful things from distant lands, each one connected with his profession and his past life. Anne took it all in quietly and felt both pleasure and a kind of sadness. It was a picture of domestic happiness built not on pride, but on work, cleverness, and mutual care.

Louisa, who was walking beside Anne after they left the house, began to praise the navy in the warmest way. "These are the only men worth admiring," she said in spirit, and perhaps almost in words. "They are open, brave, kind, and true. They know how to live, and they deserve to be loved." Anne did not argue, because much of it was true. She herself had known long ago how much charm there could be in that world. But she heard in Louisa's praise more than admiration for the navy. She heard admiration for one man in particular.

They went back to the inn, dressed for dinner, and spent the evening pleasantly enough. Anne found that she was becoming a little more able than before to sit near Captain Wentworth without losing all command of herself. They exchanged only the common civilities of the table, nothing more, but even that now passed without the same sharp pain as before. It was not that she felt less. It was only that feeling had learned some degree of silence.

In the evening Captain Harville came to visit them and brought Captain Benwick with him. Captain Benwick had seemed shy earlier in the day, and at first there had been some doubt whether he would come. But he came, and as chance would have it, Anne found herself sitting rather apart with him. From the first moment, her kindness led her to speak to him. He answered with reserve at first, but soon began to open his mind. His grief had turned him strongly toward poetry and tender feeling, and Anne listened with patience and intelligence.

He spoke of books, of poets, of sorrow, and of the comfort that deep feeling can find in words. Anne listened, answered gently, and then tried, without preaching, to turn the conversation toward firmer ground. She did not deny grief, because she knew too much of it herself. But she suggested that too much dwelling on sorrow can make sorrow stronger, and that the heart sometimes needs courage more than indulgence. Captain Benwick seemed grateful, though perhaps not fully convinced. Anne felt that, if she had given him no cure, she had at least offered him real sympathy.

The next day brought a new small incident. Anne noticed a gentleman at the inn, a stranger, who seemed struck by her appearance when they passed each other. Later she nearly met him again in a narrow place, and he apologized with such readiness and good manners that Anne felt curious about him. He was not handsome, but he had a pleasant person and the look of a man accustomed to good society. She thought no more of him then, except as one more face seen for a moment in travel.

At breakfast the mystery was partly explained. A curricle drew up, the same gentleman came out, and Captain Wentworth at once recognized him as the very man they had passed the day before. When inquiry was made, the waiter said that he was Mr Elliot, a gentleman of large fortune, on his way to Bath and London. The name made them all look at one another. Mary cried out that he must be their cousin, their father’s heir, and she was full of surprise that he had been under the same roof with them. Anne was surprised too, though in a quieter way. It was an odd meeting, and a name that would matter again later.

After breakfast they went out once more upon the Cobb. The sea, the wind,

and the movement of the place seemed to give life to everybody. Louisa in particular was full of activity and high spirits. She liked running forward, calling back, and showing that she feared nothing. Captain Wentworth was near her a good deal, and though Anne did not watch them with jealousy, she could not fail to see how easy and eager Louisa was in his company. Henrietta, gentler and less decided, followed with the rest. Anne herself moved more slowly, enjoying the scene, yet with an inward quiet that was very different from Louisa's restless joy.

They came at last to the steps on the Cobb, where people were going up and down over the rough stone. Louisa, full of play and confidence, had already once jumped down into Captain Wentworth's arms and been safely caught. She laughed and wanted to do it again. Anne, seeing the danger of such thoughtless spirits joined to such encouragement, felt uneasy at once. It was not a place for games. The steps were hard, the height was real, and one mistake would be enough.

Captain Wentworth spoke to Louisa, perhaps half in amusement and half in warning, but she was too animated to listen well. She prepared herself again with the same bright confidence. This time, however, all did not happen as before. In one terrible instant she sprang, he was not ready, there was a slip, a cry, and Louisa fell. She struck her head against the stone and lay motionless where she had fallen.

For a second no one seemed able to understand what had happened. Then all was confusion. Henrietta screamed, Mary cried out, Charles ran forward, and Captain Wentworth stood fixed in horror. The life and brightness of the morning were gone in a moment. On the hard stones of the Cobb, with the sea sounding beside them and frightened voices rising around, they all saw the same dreadful thing: Louisa did not move.

Part 7

For one terrible moment after Louisa fell, no one seemed able to act. The shock was too sudden. The cries of the others, the sound of the sea, and the sight of Louisa lying still on the stone steps all joined to make the scene almost wild. Then Anne became the one steady mind among them. She spoke clearly, called for help,

and told them what must be done at once. Captain Wentworth, who a little earlier had seemed the readiest and strongest of them all, was now overcome by horror and looked to Anne for direction.

Louisa was lifted with the greatest care and carried away from the Cobb. Henrietta was half beside herself and could neither think nor help. Mary was frightened into useless complaint. Charles tried to do what was needed, but the suddenness of the accident had shaken him too. Captain Benwick and Captain Harville were both active and kind, and the Harvilles' house was opened with the same warmth and generosity they had shown from the first moment of the visit. Anne's voice, quiet and practical, seemed to hold the whole confused group together while they moved Louisa and sent for the surgeon.

Once Louisa had been taken inside, the distress did not end. In some ways it became worse, because now there was time to fear. No one could say at once how much harm had been done by the blow to her head. They could only wait, watch, and hope. Through all this waiting, Anne continued to be useful. She calmed Henrietta, answered Mary, helped the Harvilles, and made decision after decision with the good sense that no one else at that moment possessed.

Captain Wentworth felt all this very deeply. He was full of self-reproach, and with reason, because he knew how much his own admiration of Louisa's boldness had encouraged the very spirit that had now brought danger upon her. He could hardly bear to hear the accident spoken of. At one moment, when grief broke through the control he was trying to keep, he cried out in pain that he ought not to have given way to her at that fatal moment. Anne, seeing his suffering, could not help wondering whether he now began to doubt the opinion he had once expressed so warmly, that firmness was always the greatest strength.

The surgeon came and gave what comfort he could, though not enough to make anyone easy. There was hope, but not certainty. Louisa breathed, moved a little, and showed signs that life remained strong in her; still, her danger could not be denied. Captain and Mrs Harville at once offered every possible care. Their small house, already full, made room without complaint for one more anxiety, one more burden, and one more object of affection. Anne saw there again what she had

already seen in them before: real goodness, real hospitality, and the power of affection to make even narrow circumstances seem large enough.

During those anxious hours, Anne and Captain Wentworth were drawn into a new understanding, though very few words passed between them. He no longer treated her with cold ceremony. When something had to be done, his eyes turned to her naturally, as if he had not forgotten that she could be trusted. At least once, in the midst of distress, he seemed near saying more than custom allowed, as if gratitude and dependence were breaking through the reserve of the last weeks. Anne felt the change, but she did not dwell on it. Louisa's danger was too real for personal comfort to stand first in her thoughts.

At length it became necessary to decide who should stay at Lyme and who should return to Uppercross with the news. This was not easy. Charles must remain near his sister. Henrietta was so distressed that she could not be left to travel without support. Anne, whose usefulness to Louisa had been evident to all, would gladly have stayed if staying had been the clearest duty. But Mary began to complain bitterly at the idea of being sent home without her husband, and after much selfish resistance on her side, the arrangement had to change. Anne was the one who yielded, as she so often did, and prepared to leave Lyme with Henrietta.

The journey away from Lyme was painful in every way. Captain Wentworth placed Anne and Henrietta in the carriage and seated himself between them. His whole attention was given to Henrietta, whose grief was open and natural, and Anne did not complain of this. Indeed, it was proper that he should try to support her. His voice was generally calm, because he wished above all to keep her from greater agitation, but now and then feeling overcame him. When Henrietta lamented the unlucky walk to the Cobb, he broke out suddenly, full of remorse, and spoke Louisa's name with a tenderness that could not be mistaken. Anne heard it in silence. The words hurt her, but they also taught her something.

She now understood more clearly than before what his recent conduct had meant. Whether he had loved Louisa or had only been moving toward that love, he had at least been far enough engaged in feeling to be struck to the heart by her danger. Anne did not blame him. She only saw, with a sadness that was very quiet

and very deep, how far life had carried them both since the days when they had belonged first to each other. Yet even in that sadness there was a kind of justice. He was suffering, and she could not wish him free from pain at too easy a cost. She only wished Louisa saved.

At Uppercross, anxiety spread at once through the whole family. Mr and Mrs Musgrove were overwhelmed, but they bore themselves with more true feeling than clever speech. The younger children were sent for from school, letters passed, messages came and went, and every day brought some fresh report from Lyme. Anne moved quietly among them and was soon valued more than ever. Mrs Musgrove thanked her again and again for all she had done. No one who had seen that dreadful day on the Cobb could now forget Anne's usefulness, judgment, and calmness.

As the first shock passed, better news began slowly to arrive. Louisa was still weak, but she was recovering. Her mother could at last speak of her without the same terror in every sentence. The Harvilles remained as kind as before, and their care seemed to make all the difference that kindness can make in sickness. Captain Wentworth, however, did not stay near her. He had not seen Louisa since the accident and was afraid that an interview might do her harm. At last he went away for a time to visit his brother in Shropshire. The move seemed natural enough, yet to Anne it also meant that whatever had been forming between him and Louisa was now uncertain and suspended.

Uppercross itself soon became lively again, almost too lively. The house filled with children, visitors, noise, and movement. Anne could see that such cheerful confusion was a comfort to Mrs Musgrove, who needed family bustle around her after the strain she had endured. But Anne's own mind was quieter than the rooms around her. She could not forget Lyme, or the change that had begun there. Captain Wentworth's reserve toward her had softened, but in suffering, not in peace. Louisa lived and improved, and that was the first thing. Yet after Lyme, nothing in their little world seemed quite as simple as it had been before.

Part 8

When Anne at last went to Bath, she entered Camden Place with a heavy heart. Sir Walter and Elizabeth were very happy there, but Anne felt as if she were walking into a long prison. Still, she was received with more warmth than she had expected. Her father and sister were glad to show her the house, the rooms, and the furniture, and seemed pleased that she now made a fourth at dinner. Their kindness did her some good, even though she could see at once that it came less from affection than from comfort and vanity.

Mrs Clay was all smiles, as Anne had expected, but there was little need of skill in such smiles now, because everything around her was going well. Sir Walter and Elizabeth had only one subject that truly interested them, and that subject was Bath. Uppercross meant nothing to them, and Kellynch almost nothing. They cared only for the size of their drawing rooms, the elegance of their house, the number of cards left by strangers, and the pleasure of feeling themselves sought after. Anne listened quietly while they praised the place again and again.

Their satisfaction was easy to understand, even if Anne could not share it. Sir Walter thought the house in Camden Place exactly right for a man of consequence. Elizabeth moved proudly from one drawing room to the other and admired the width and height of rooms that were, in truth, nothing beside Kellynch Hall. Anne could not help smiling sadly at this. A woman who had once ruled such a house as Kellynch was now delighted by the distance between two city walls. Yet she had no wish to laugh at them harshly, because their foolish pleasure was real enough.

But the house and the rooms were not the greatest cause of their happiness. They had Mr Elliot too. Anne soon learned that the relation once hated and rejected was now welcomed with pleasure. He had come to Bath, had called at Camden Place at once, and had followed that first step with every effort to restore himself to favor. He apologized for the past, explained away old misunderstandings, and asked to be received again as a cousin and heir. Sir Walter and Elizabeth were delighted to forgive him.

They had heard from him, and from Colonel Wallis, everything that could

soften the old story of his marriage. The lady had not been well born, but she had been rich, well educated, and deeply in love with him. Sir Walter accepted this as almost a full excuse. Elizabeth did not forgive quite so easily, but she too allowed that the disgrace was much less than it had once seemed. Mr Elliot had dined with them, called often, and shown clear pleasure in every mark of notice from Camden Place. To Sir Walter, this was all very agreeable.

Anne listened to all this with attention, but not with complete belief. She knew too well how much her father and sister could dress any story in fine colors. Mr Elliot's conduct might perhaps be less noble than they supposed. It seemed strange to her that, after so many years, he should now care so much to stand well with Sir Walter. He had little to gain in money, and little to fear from any continued coldness. The title and estate would be his in time whether Sir Walter smiled on him or not.

She could think of only one probable explanation. Perhaps he had once liked Elizabeth, and perhaps that feeling had returned now that he was free to act as he pleased. Elizabeth was still handsome, polished in manner, and ready to think well of herself. A man who had known her only in public might still judge her favorably. Anne therefore watched with some concern, because if Mr Elliot's object were really Elizabeth, much would depend on how well he understood her before he went too far. She also noticed enough between Elizabeth and Mrs Clay to see that both women were willing to believe such a plan possible.

Anne mentioned, though without much effect, that she had seen something of Mr Elliot at Lyme. Her father and sister hardly listened. They preferred to speak of his appearance in their own way. Sir Walter praised his air, his eye, and his gentlemanlike manner, while also complaining that his face had altered for the worse and that time had not treated him kindly. Still, he allowed that Mr Elliot was a man with whom he did not object to be seen. Such approval, from Sir Walter, was no small thing.

The next morning Anne's uneasiness about Mrs Clay increased rather than lessened. At breakfast she heard enough to show that Mrs Clay had made a proper little offer to go away, and that both Sir Walter and Elizabeth were urging her to

remain. Elizabeth said, in a low voice, that Anne was nothing to her compared with Mrs Clay. Sir Walter spoke even more warmly, telling Mrs Clay that she had seen nothing of Bath yet and must stay to know the beautiful Mrs Wallis. Anne could not hear him speak with such earnestness without fresh alarm. The danger she had once tried to point out to Elizabeth seemed no smaller now.

Yet Sir Walter, left alone with Anne later that morning, spoke in a way that showed how lightly and foolishly he still judged women. He complimented Anne on her improved looks and asked whether she had been using any special lotion. When Anne said no, he at once named Gowland and added that Mrs Clay had used it at his advice, and that it had done great things for her freckles. Anne could not help thinking that, if Elizabeth had heard this, it might at least have opened her eyes a little. But Elizabeth heard nothing, and Bath continued as before.

Lady Russell, meanwhile, felt every slight shown to Anne and every favor shown to Mrs Clay much more deeply than Anne herself allowed herself to feel it. Yet even Lady Russell began to find Mr Elliot highly agreeable. His manners pleased her at once, and conversation with him seemed only to confirm the first good impression. She found him calm, correct, sensible, moderate, and full of proper regard for family and domestic life. Before long she was almost ready to forget every old complaint against him. Anne saw this change with surprise, but not with anger, because she had long known that she and Lady Russell could think differently.

Lady Russell saw nothing suspicious in Mr Elliot's wish to be reconciled with his family. To her, it seemed natural that a man older and wiser than before should wish to stand well with the head of his house. Anne was less certain, and at last she quietly said one word: "Elizabeth." Lady Russell only answered, "Elizabeth? Very well. Time will explain." Anne understood that, for the present, she could determine nothing. Elizabeth, as the eldest daughter, would naturally receive the first marked attention, and Mr Elliot had not yet been many months a widower.

Still, whatever his purpose might be, Anne could not deny that he was the pleasantest man they knew in Bath. His conversation was better than that of the empty people her father admired. He was especially agreeable to her when he

spoke of Lyme, which he seemed to remember with real pleasure. They went over the circumstances of their first meeting there more than once, and he made it clear that he had looked at her with particular notice from the beginning. Anne understood that perfectly. Yet while she listened to him, she could not help remembering another look, from another man, which mattered far more to her.

There remained, however, a real difference between Anne and Mr Elliot. He cared much more for rank and connection than she did. This became very plain when the arrival of the Dowager Viscountess Dalrymple and her daughter, Miss Carteret, threw Camden Place into excitement. These ladies were cousins of the Elliots, and Sir Walter and Elizabeth were seized with anxiety about how to renew the connection properly. Their talk of "our cousins in Laura Place" sounded in Anne's ears all day long. She had never before seen her father and sister so eager for the notice of rank higher than their own, and she was ashamed of it.

Mr Elliot and Lady Russell both thought the connection worth securing, though in a more reasonable manner than Sir Walter. At last Sir Walter wrote an elaborate letter, and a short answer came back from Lady Dalrymple. This was enough. Visits were exchanged, cards were placed where they might best be seen, and the whole house seemed satisfied. Anne found both Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret dull and unimpressive. Lady Dalrymple was called charming only because she smiled and answered politely, and Miss Carteret had nothing to recommend her except birth.

When Anne spoke honestly of this to Mr Elliot, he half agreed and half resisted. She said, "My idea of good company is clever, well-informed people who can really talk." He answered gently that this was not merely good company but the very best, and that the world often asked much less. He then urged her to accept the advantages of connection and position as things of real use in Bath. Anne replied that she was almost too proud to enjoy a welcome that depended so entirely on place. Mr Elliot smiled at this, and in a lower voice hinted that any addition to Sir Walter's grand acquaintance might at least draw him away from those below him. As he spoke, he looked toward the place Mrs Clay had lately occupied, and Anne could not help being pleased that on this point, at least, he

seemed to judge as she did.

Part 9

Bath still did not please Anne, but she soon found one part of it that mattered to her very much. She renewed an old school friendship with Mrs Smith, who now lived in Westgate Buildings. Mrs Smith had once been lively, pretty, and full of hope, but years had treated her very badly. She was a widow, poor, and in weak health, and she had to spend most of her time in her room. Yet when Anne went to see her, she found not bitterness, but courage and kindness.

Mrs Smith received her with real warmth. She spoke openly, laughed naturally, and showed none of the cold pride that Anne knew too well at Camden Place. Her life had become narrow, but her mind had not become small. She understood people quickly, remembered the world she had once moved in, and had a way of making even hardship sound bearable. Anne left her first visit with both pain and pleasure in her heart, because she had seen suffering, but she had also seen strength.

These visits soon became one of Anne's chief comforts in Bath. Sir Walter and Elizabeth thought Westgate Buildings a place beneath notice, and they had no understanding of why Anne should care to go there. Anne did not mind that. In Mrs Smith's small room she found more sincerity, more intelligence, and more feeling than in many grand drawing rooms. She also found that true good breeding can remain where wealth, health, and outward ease have all been lost.

Mrs Smith, in return, quickly showed how much she valued Anne. She had known her first at school, but she now understood her more deeply. She saw Anne's patience, her quiet strength, and the gentle manner in which she bore neglect without becoming bitter. It was a pleasure to both of them to meet again under such altered conditions. The friendship, broken by years, joined itself anew with surprising ease.

Meanwhile, Mr Elliot continued to rise in the opinion of almost everybody around Anne. Sir Walter admired him, Elizabeth accepted him, and Lady Russell

came nearer every day to thinking him all that he ought to be. He was careful, well-spoken, steady in manner, and always correct. He showed attention without rushing, and respect without stiffness. To people who valued prudence and polish, he seemed very nearly perfect.

Anne could not deny that he was agreeable. He talked well, judged calmly, and understood how to please without appearing to try too hard. Yet even while she admitted all this, she remained uncertain. Something in him seemed too even, too smooth, and too much arranged. He had sense, but not warmth; taste, but not openness; and though he could say many proper things, Anne was never carried by him out of herself for a single moment.

Lady Russell, however, began to think of him in a new way. She no longer imagined that his chief object in Bath was Elizabeth. Little by little she came to see that his attention turned more often toward Anne. This idea pleased her greatly. In her eyes, here at last might be the very match that would repair the mistake of years before: a man of good family, good fortune, good manners, and mature judgment, offering himself to Anne at a proper age and in proper circumstances.

Anne understood this change in Lady Russell's mind almost as soon as it began. She was not angry, because she knew the thought came from affection. Yet she could not share it. She respected Mr Elliot more than many other men she had met, but respect was not enough. There was no danger of her heart being won by quiet fitness alone, because her heart had once been given in another way, and she knew too well the difference between liking a man's conduct and loving the man himself.

About this time, letters from the country brought news that surprised everyone. Louisa Musgrove, still recovering from her terrible fall, had become engaged to Captain Benwick. The news seemed strange at first because, until then, Captain Benwick had been known only as a man sunk in grief, and Louisa as a girl who had seemed drawn in another direction. Yet the more the story was told, the more natural it appeared. Long illness, daily attendance, gratitude, tenderness, and nearness had done their work.

This engagement gave different feelings to different people. Mary was astonished, Henrietta was relieved, and the Musgroves tried to be pleased, though

they had hardly expected such an end. Anne, after the first surprise, saw the fitness of it quickly. Captain Benwick needed warmth and domestic affection, and Louisa had both spirit and a heart ready to attach itself strongly. More than that, Anne at once understood what this engagement must mean for Captain Wentworth.

He was now free, if indeed he had ever truly meant to bind himself. That thought came to Anne at once, but she would not let it carry her too far. She had learned too much from the past to build happiness on uncertain signs. Still, the news changed the color of things around her. Bath was the same city, Camden Place was the same house, Mr Elliot was still attentive, and Lady Russell was still hopeful; but beneath all this, Anne now felt that the future was no longer closed in quite the same way as before.

Part 10

Not long after the news of Louisa's engagement, Anne had the meeting in Bath which she had both wished for and feared. She was out in Milsom Street when she suddenly saw Admiral Croft and Captain Wentworth. The meeting was short, but it was enough to shake her whole mind. Captain Wentworth spoke properly, and there was no coldness in his manner, but there was still no freedom either. Anne went home feeling that something had changed, yet not enough.

The small event was made greater by hope. He had come to Bath quickly after Louisa was no longer free, and Anne could not keep herself from thinking of that. She tried to be cautious and not turn every look into a promise. Yet she felt that his presence in Bath was not an accident. A man like Captain Wentworth did not move without a reason, and Anne's heart could not help asking whether that reason might still be herself.

Soon after this came the evening of the concert. Sir Walter and Elizabeth were pleased to go because Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret were going. Mr Elliot was of the party too, and Lady Russell's good opinion of him now seemed almost complete. Anne went because she had to go, not because she expected pleasure. Yet from the first moment she entered the rooms, she felt that the evening would

not be an ordinary one. The place was full, the air warm, the voices many, and every turn seemed likely to bring some sudden meeting.

Captain Wentworth was there. Anne saw him not long after they entered, and for some moments she could only feel how near he was. Music, lights, and company all became secondary. She tried to look composed and to speak when spoken to, but much of her attention was fixed on where he stood, who spoke to him, and whether he seemed to seek or avoid her. He did not come to her at once, and this uncertainty was harder to bear than open neglect would have been.

At last there came a moment in the Octagon Room when she was able to move toward him and speak. It was only a few words, and yet to Anne those few words mattered greatly. She had crossed the distance herself, and he answered her with feeling as well as civility. The moment might have become more. There was enough in his face to show hope, fear, and deep attention. But before anything could settle between them, Mr Elliot appeared and took possession of Anne's time again.

Mr Elliot did not act rudely. Indeed, he acted with the very politeness that could make interruption hardest to resist. He placed himself by Anne, spoke to her, guided her toward Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret, and made it nearly impossible for her to remain where she wished. To everybody else, his conduct may have looked natural and even attentive in a proper way. To Anne, it felt like being quietly drawn away at the very instant when her happiness had almost come within reach.

She could see, too, what the scene must look like to Captain Wentworth. There she was, standing with her cousin, receiving his notice, while Lady Russell sat near enough to seem part of the whole arrangement. The very people whose approval would favor such a match were around her. Every old pain that had once separated Anne and Wentworth seemed present in that room again, only under brighter lights and finer manners. Anne wanted, with all her soul, to show that appearances were false, but she could not speak freely enough to do it.

The concert itself passed almost without meaning for her. She heard the music, but only as a far-off sound behind stronger thoughts. More than once she looked

toward Captain Wentworth, and more than once she believed his face showed increasing distress. He seemed unable to remain easy where he was, yet unable to come nearer. Mr Elliot continued to be at Anne's side too often, and every minute made the whole mistake more painful. It was one of those evenings in which a few inches of distance seem wider than years.

At one point, Anne sat down and found Captain Benwick near her. Mr Elliot soon joined them, and the talk turned toward poetry and books. Benwick, with his usual serious warmth, was ready enough on such subjects. Mr Elliot spoke well too, but lightly, as a man who knew how to converse rather than a man who deeply felt what he said. Anne answered as she could, though her thoughts were not with poetry. Her heart was turned toward another part of the room, where Captain Wentworth had been placed among people who were no friends to his hopes.

Captain Wentworth came near enough once to listen, and Anne felt rather than saw that he was wounded by what he imagined. To him, Mr Elliot must have seemed the favored man, the chosen relation, the one whom every influence around Anne supported. Anne later understood this very clearly. At the time, she only knew that his whole countenance had changed. Hope and pain appeared in turns, and then pain seemed to win. Before the evening ended, he withdrew again into a manner more reserved than before.

Anne left the concert troubled and restless. She had gained one precious thing: she no longer doubted that Captain Wentworth still felt strongly. But she had also lost something, because she feared he had gone away under a false impression. She knew too well how much mischief can be done by pride, old memory, and one unlucky appearance. The evening had been full of feeling, but feeling alone could not cure misunderstanding. Anne went home with hope alive, yet hope wounded and uncertain.

The next morning did not bring rest. Anne had intended to spend part of the day with Lady Russell, but this plan was set aside when she went instead to the White Hart, where the Musgroves and Harvilles were staying. She was warmly welcomed there and soon drawn into the usual helpful work that always seemed to fall naturally to her. Henrietta, now happily engaged, was full of affection

toward everyone. Mrs Musgrove spoke gratefully of the past. Mary, as usual, required attention in twenty small ways at once. For a little while all this practical kindness steadied Anne's mind.

But the calm did not last. Before long Charles returned with Captain Harville and Captain Wentworth. The surprise of seeing him enter so suddenly among them was almost too much for Anne. She felt at once that their last meeting at the concert still stood between them. His face seemed to say that he remained under the same mistaken belief. He did not place himself near enough for free conversation, and Anne, though she tried to trust that true feeling must in time understand true feeling, felt how easily hearts may still wound each other when speech is wanting.

Then came one more painful moment. Mary, sitting at the window, suddenly cried out that she could see Mrs Clay under the colonnade speaking with a gentleman. In another second she declared that the gentleman was Mr Elliot. Anne answered too quickly that it could not be him, because he had been meant to leave Bath and not return till the next day. The words were simple, but the very quickness of them betrayed that she knew his movements too exactly. At once Anne felt Captain Wentworth's eyes on her, and the feeling of being misunderstood returned more sharply than before.

Mary would not let the matter rest. She called Anne to the window, insisted that she look, and spoke so loudly that other people in the room began to smile as if they understood a secret between Anne and Mr Elliot. Anne was forced at last to rise and look, if only to quiet Mary and hide her own embarrassment. That small scene, foolish in itself, seemed to Anne full of danger. It could only confirm Captain Wentworth in the very error she most wished to remove. And so the chapter of hope that had opened in Milsom Street, and deepened for one bright moment in the concert room, closed again in uncertainty.

Part 11

The next morning Anne was glad to remember that she had promised to visit

Mrs Smith. The visit would keep her away from home at the very hour when Mr Elliot would be most likely to call, and to avoid him had now become one of her first wishes. She still felt gratitude toward him for some parts of his conduct, and she could not forget the strange circumstances that had brought them together again. Yet all this only made her situation more painful, because gratitude was not love, and every attention from him now seemed to threaten confusion where she wanted only clearness. As she walked through Bath to Westgate Buildings, her heart, in spite of all this trouble, still belonged wholly to Captain Wentworth.

Mrs Smith received her with unusual warmth, and almost with relief. She wanted at once to hear every possible detail of the concert, and Anne, because her own recollections of it were full of strong feeling, spoke more freely than she had expected to do. Mrs Smith, however, knew Bath so well, and knew by name so many of the people who mattered there, that she asked one question after another which Anne could hardly answer. Mrs Smith laughed at this and said, in effect, that Anne had gone to a concert and yet seemed to have seen almost nobody. Anne smiled too, because the truth was plain enough: she had seen very little indeed, except what mattered most to herself.

Then the talk turned suddenly in a new direction. Mrs Smith began to speak as if Anne's marriage to Mr Elliot were already expected by everyone. Anne was surprised at once and asked where such an idea could possibly have come from. Mrs Smith answered that it had seemed the natural thing for the world to suppose. Anne and Mr Elliot had been much together, the match would please almost everybody around them, and only one thing had prevented Mrs Smith from feeling quite certain of it. "There must be somebody else," she said, in substance, and Anne understood at once that her friend had seen more than many other people.

Anne was eager now to know how such a report had spread. Mrs Smith explained that the source was Nurse Rooke, the same nurse who moved so easily through other people's houses, hearing and gathering news wherever she went. She had lately come from Marlborough Buildings, where Mrs Wallis lived, and had brought the report with her. Mrs Wallis, it seemed, had spoken of Anne and Mr Elliot as if their marriage were nearly settled. Anne laughed at the supposed

“whole history” of so small and false a matter, but Mrs Smith did not laugh with her. Instead, she grew thoughtful and quiet, as if she were deciding whether to say something much more serious.

Anne then offered, with real kindness, to help her if Mr Elliot could be of use in any business. At first Mrs Smith refused quickly and almost with embarrassment. Anne asked a few simple questions about how long she had known him, and learned that she had known him well before his marriage and had once been intimately acquainted with him. That alone was enough to awaken Anne’s curiosity. She wanted to know what sort of man he had been in youth, and whether he had always seemed as calm and polished as he now appeared. Mrs Smith answered gravely and only said that she had not seen him for three years. The weight of her manner made Anne feel that something important was still being held back.

At last Mrs Smith begged Anne’s pardon for her short replies and said honestly that she had been uncertain what duty required. She did not want to speak badly of any man without need. She did not want to make mischief. But now that Anne had clearly denied any engagement to Mr Elliot, Mrs Smith believed silence would be a greater wrong than speech. She then said plainly that Mr Elliot was not a safe man to trust and that Anne ought to know the truth of him. Anne listened with complete attention, because she saw that what was coming would change not only her own understanding, but perhaps the peace of her whole family.

Mrs Smith first explained the point nearest Anne’s present concerns. Mr Elliot, she said, had never had any serious wish to marry Elizabeth. He had returned to the family from wholly selfish reasons. He knew very well that Sir Walter might, in a moment of vanity or weakness, be drawn into marrying Mrs Clay, and he feared such a marriage because it might produce a son and take the title and estate out of his own future possession. His present intimacy with the Elliots was therefore not born from affection, duty, or repentance. It was a form of watchfulness. He wanted to keep himself near enough to prevent the one marriage that might damage his interests.

This did not mean, however, that he was indifferent to Anne. Mrs Smith

believed he admired her sincerely, and that if it had suited his convenience he might indeed have wished to marry her. Yet even that possibility did not soften the picture she drew of him. His chief principle, she said, had always been selfishness. He could be agreeable, sensible, and correct when it served him, but these qualities did not come from generosity. Even his concern about Mrs Clay did not spring from moral dislike. It came from fear of losing advantage. He thought Mrs Clay knew that he understood her, and that his presence kept her cautious. That was all.

Mrs Smith then added another strange detail which showed how freely Bath society was talking. Mrs Wallis, through Nurse Rooke, had imagined that if Anne and Mr Elliot married, some clause might be put into the marriage settlement to prevent Sir Walter from marrying Mrs Clay. Mrs Smith repeated this with some amusement and gave Nurse Rooke's sensible answer, that such a clause would hardly stop Sir Walter from marrying someone else. Anne, though troubled, could not help seeing the absurdity too. Still, beneath the absurdity lay a serious truth. Mr Elliot's actions were not guided by feeling. He was arranging people like pieces on a board.

Anne heard all this with a mixture of pain and relief. It was painful to know that she must continue to meet such a man in society. It was painful too that Lady Russell, her father, and Elizabeth were all so deceived by him. Yet it was also a relief to understand him clearly at last. "My conduct will be more direct now," Anne said. "I shall know better what to do." In her own mind she judged him firmly. He was worldly, artful, and false in the deepest sense, because even his best manners were used in the service of self-interest.

But Mrs Smith had still more to tell. Her own history with Mr Elliot was darker than anything Anne had yet heard. Mrs Smith and her husband had once been among his closest friends. Mr Smith had been affectionate, easy, and weak where Mr Elliot was cool, cautious, and strong. The two men had long lived in intimacy, and when Mr Elliot married a rich woman and rose into greater ease, he did nothing to save his friend from ruin. On the contrary, he encouraged expenses and pleasures that Mr Smith's fortune could not bear. The result had been disaster for

the Smiths and safety for Mr Elliot, who had enjoyed all the advantages of friendship while taking none of its responsibilities.

Mrs Smith spoke of her husband with tenderness, and Anne could see that she did not want to place too much blame on the dead. Yet the truth became plain enough. Mr Smith had been led, influenced, and perhaps quietly despised by the friend he trusted most. When ruin came, Mr Elliot did not act with justice or compassion. He had shown himself cold where kindness was owed, inactive where help was possible, and careful only for his own comfort. Mrs Smith had suffered not only from poverty and illness, but from seeing clearly, too late, the real nature of a man once admitted so closely into her life.

The account left Anne deeply moved. She could not doubt Mrs Smith's sincerity, and all she had lately observed in Mr Elliot now fit too well with this fuller explanation. She even shuddered to think that, under different circumstances, she might perhaps once have been persuaded to accept him. Mrs Smith then returned to the practical question that had first made her hesitate. She had once hoped Anne, as Mr Elliot's future wife, might be persuaded to use her influence in a matter connected with Mrs Smith's property and affairs. But since no such marriage would take place, that hope was gone. One useful thing remained, however: Anne must be free to warn Lady Russell.

They therefore agreed, before the long visit ended, that Anne might tell Lady Russell everything concerning Mr Elliot's conduct as far as Mrs Smith was concerned. It was necessary that Lady Russell should no longer be deceived. Anne rose at last to leave, grateful as she had seldom been before for any piece of knowledge, however painful. She had gone out that morning merely wishing to avoid an unwelcome caller. She returned with a full understanding of the danger hidden behind polite manners and graceful words. The world around her had not changed, but she now saw it with far clearer eyes.

Part 12

After leaving Mrs Smith, Anne went home with a mind full of new knowledge

and new anxiety. One thing had become much easier. She no longer felt the least softness toward Mr Elliot. He now stood before her as a selfish man who had used attention, family feeling, and polite conduct for his own advantage. But if one burden had been lifted, others remained. Lady Russell must soon be hurt and disappointed. Her father and Elizabeth might also suffer when the truth came out. And above all, Anne still did not know how Captain Wentworth could be made to understand her real feelings.

The next day she went again to the White Hart, where the Musgroves and Harvilles were staying. The rooms there had none of the pride of Camden Place, but to Anne they felt far more alive. Warm feeling moved more freely there. Real pleasure and real pain were both allowed to appear without being dressed up for society. Anne, who was always most at ease where she could be quietly useful, soon found herself helping in small matters and listening where listening was wanted. Yet beneath all this she was waiting, though she hardly allowed herself to say so, for one person.

Captain Wentworth came. He entered with Captain Harville, and Anne felt at once that his manner had changed again. It was not open ease, but it was no longer cold. There was strong feeling in him, held down but not hidden. He spoke little at first. The room was full enough, and there were too many eyes and ears for freedom. Even so, Anne felt that the distance between them was not now the same as it had been at Uppercross or even at the concert. Something was near its end, though she could not yet know whether that end would be happiness or disappointment.

Anne soon found herself seated near Captain Harville, while Captain Wentworth sat at a table a little way off, writing a letter. Harville began to talk of Captain Benwick and Louisa. He was kindly surprised that Benwick had forgotten his first deep sorrow and attached himself so quickly to another woman. Anne answered gently that no one should judge too harshly. A man may suffer truly and still recover. Human hearts are not all alike, and grief does not move with the same step in every life. Harville listened, but he was not convinced.

From this they passed naturally to a larger question. Harville said that men

love longest, because women forget sooner. Anne could not let that stand. She spoke more warmly than she usually did, because the subject went too close to her own heart. “No,” she said, in effect, “I do not agree. Men have always had the stronger voice in books and stories, but that does not prove that they feel more deeply. Women live quietly, remember quietly, and endure quietly. Their history is not written in the same way, but that does not make it less true.” Captain Harville argued honestly from what he had seen among his friends, and Anne answered from what she knew inwardly to be true.

While they spoke, Anne became aware that Captain Wentworth, though still apparently writing, was listening to every word. She did not look directly at him at first, but she felt his attention as strongly as if he had spoken. The whole room seemed to narrow itself into that one hidden line between the table and her chair. Harville went on, insisting that all history, all poetry, and all common opinion were on the side of men. Anne answered with sudden force that men had always had every outward advantage. They had education, language, public action, and the power to tell their own story. Women had none of these in the same degree. Her voice was low, but her meaning was deep and clear.

At that very point, Sir Walter and Elizabeth came in and chilled the room at once. Their elegance, their smooth manner, and their self-importance fell over the company like cold water. Anne felt it immediately. The easy life of the room disappeared. Elizabeth, however, had her own purpose. She had at last decided that Captain Wentworth was a man worth having in her drawing room, and so she gave a graceful invitation to everyone for the next evening, with one marked card and one marked smile especially for him. Anne watched him receive the card. She saw surprise in his face, and something like disdain behind his politeness. She could not believe he valued such notice as a real honor.

After Sir Walter and Elizabeth went away, ease slowly returned to the room. But Anne’s own ease did not return. She was thinking too much of the invitation, of the way it had been given, and of the way Captain Wentworth had received it. Mary, as usual, spoke too loudly and too carelessly. She said she did not wonder Captain Wentworth should be pleased, and laughed as if the whole matter were

simple. Anne could only feel how much still depended on appearances, and how easily appearances might yet do harm.

A little later, Anne had to leave. She was not well, and her family wished her to go home and rest before evening. She wanted, above all, to make sure that Captain Wentworth knew he and Captain Harville were still expected at Camden Place. She therefore spoke earnestly to Mrs Musgrove and asked her to repeat the message clearly to both gentlemen. Even this small uncertainty troubled her, because after so much pain, she feared every little accident. Charles Musgrove then insisted on walking home with her. Anne would rather have gone alone, because solitude might have given her one chance of meeting the person she most wished to meet, but she was grateful for Charles's kindness and could not refuse him.

They were walking through the street when Anne heard a quicker step behind them and knew, even before she turned, who it must be. Captain Wentworth came up and joined them. He said nothing at first. He only walked near, as if uncertain whether to stay or pass on. Then Charles, who had no idea of the feelings around him, suddenly said, "Captain Wentworth, are you going toward Camden Place? If so, take my place. Give Anne your arm to the door, and I can turn off here." There was no graceful way to refuse. In the next moment Anne found herself walking beside Captain Wentworth, alone at last.

For a few steps neither of them could speak freely. Then Captain Wentworth, in a voice deeply moved, said that he had written to her and asked whether she had the letter. Anne answered that she had. He then spoke with the whole force of a long-silenced heart. He said that he had been listening to her while she talked with Harville, and that he could stay silent no longer. He loved her still. He had loved no one else in all those years. He had come to Bath full of conflict, hurt by old memory and by new jealousy, but never free from her. Anne could not answer much, because feeling was too strong for many words. Yet what she did say was enough. There was no longer any doubt between them.

When they had reached a place quiet enough for a truer understanding, they spoke more openly. Captain Wentworth confessed that, after returning to England

some years earlier with money and success, he had thought of writing to Anne and asking again for her promise. But he had been too proud. He had believed himself rejected and had chosen not to test the past. Anne answered with emotion that, had he written then, she would indeed have answered him. The pain of that lost chance moved them both deeply. He blamed his own pride. She did not blame him, because she knew too well how cruelly pride and misunderstanding can work when love has once been wounded.

They were now entirely restored to each other. No formal renewal was needed, because the old truth had simply risen again, stronger and clearer than before. The years of separation, the error of youth, the suffering, the jealousy, and the silence had not destroyed their attachment. They had only carried it through pain into maturity. Anne felt no triumph, only deep peace. Captain Wentworth's whole manner changed as peace came to him too. The agitation remained, but it was now the agitation of happiness.

For a little while longer they walked and spoke as people do when many years must be gathered into a few moments. There were practical things still to come, and other people's feelings would have to be faced. But those belonged to the next stage. The great uncertainty was over. They understood each other completely again. Whatever coldness or foolishness might still wait for them at Camden Place, Anne and Captain Wentworth had at last recovered the one thing they had once lost: full faith in each other's heart.

Part 13

What followed after that walk was not easy in every outward way, but it was easy in the one way that mattered most. Anne and Captain Wentworth understood each other fully at last, and because they understood each other, they were able to face every lesser difficulty with calm hearts. They were no longer two very young people, divided by pride, persuasion, and uncertainty. They had suffered, reflected, and grown older. They now came together with clearer judgment, firmer purpose, and a knowledge of each other that no first attachment, however warm, could have

entirely given.

They had, besides, one great advantage which they had not had before. Captain Wentworth was no longer poor. He had made his fortune in the navy and had risen by merit and activity to an honorable place in his profession. No one could now say that he had nothing to offer but hope and courage. He had both money and standing, and with these came the sort of respect that Sir Walter and Elizabeth could understand, even if they could not understand the deeper worth of his character. Anne knew this well, and though she did not measure him by such things herself, she could not help feeling relieved that the old objection had been removed.

Captain Wentworth, for his part, was ready to meet what remained with steadiness. He had once been young enough to feel every slight with fiery pride and to let resentment govern him. He was no longer that man. The love was the same, but the temper was better. He could now wait where once he would only have demanded, and he could bear coldness where once he would have turned away from it in anger. Anne felt this difference deeply. It gave her peace. Their reunion was not simply the return of old happiness. It was a stronger happiness, built on truth tested by time.

Sir Walter made no real objection. He did not suddenly become affectionate toward Anne, nor did he suddenly discover in Captain Wentworth all the qualities he ought long ago to have respected. But he had learned enough from outward facts to accept the match. Captain Wentworth was a successful man, had a well-sounding name, and, most important of all in Sir Walter's eyes, looked remarkably well. Sir Walter examined him more than once in full daylight and was much struck by his appearance. At length he seems to have decided that the distinction of Anne's birth might be fairly balanced by Captain Wentworth's good looks and position.

This was not a noble way to judge a marriage, but it was enough for Sir Walter, and with Sir Walter enough was all that could reasonably be expected. Anne did not ask for tenderness where tenderness had never been given. She was satisfied with the absence of resistance. Her father could now prepare, with very fair grace,

to write the marriage into the family record, and that alone showed how far the matter had changed from the bitter days of her first engagement. Then Captain Wentworth had been nobody. Now he was someone Sir Walter could receive without feeling himself lowered.

Elizabeth behaved even less generously, though not more violently. She did nothing openly unkind. She did not argue, protest, or condemn the connection. She only looked cold and indifferent. If Anne had expected warmth from her, she would have been wounded, but Anne expected no such thing. Elizabeth had lost too much at one stroke to view the event with pleasure. She had lost the satisfaction of feeling herself still the chief object in the family, and she had also lost the imagined future in which Mr Elliot's attention might one day return to her advantage. Anne's happiness could not be welcome to a mind so long used to placing itself first.

Yet even Elizabeth's coldness had its limits. She could not deny what all Bath might soon deny no longer: Captain Wentworth was a man whose success gave him value in the world. He had fortune, rank in his profession, and the easy confidence of a man who has made his own way. Elizabeth did not admire those things in the same free and natural spirit with which the Musgroves or the Crofts might have admired them, but she could at least recognize their effect. Her silence therefore became the silence of disappointed pride rather than active opposition.

The only person whose feelings gave Anne any real pain was Lady Russell. Anne knew, even before anything was said, that Lady Russell must suffer in two ways at once. She had to give up Mr Elliot, whom she had lately thought so highly of, and she had to learn to judge Captain Wentworth more justly than she had judged him years before. Anne could imagine the struggle perfectly. Lady Russell was not a false woman, but she was a woman who had trusted appearances too readily where both men were concerned. She had once been too quick to distrust Wentworth because his manner did not fit her ideal of caution, and too quick to trust Mr Elliot because his manner did fit her ideal of correctness.

This was not a small thing for Lady Russell to admit, and Anne knew it. It is hard for any thoughtful person to discover that a long-cherished judgment has

been almost wholly wrong. It is harder still when the mistake has touched the happiness of someone dearly loved. Lady Russell had to see that Anne, whom she meant to guide for the best, had seen more truly than she herself had done. She had to accept that Mr Elliot's polished conduct had hidden selfishness, while Captain Wentworth's more open and spirited manner had hidden nothing dishonorable at all. Anne did not press her. She only waited with tenderness and hope.

And Lady Russell, because she was truly good, came right in the end. Her pride in her own judgment was not stronger than her love for Anne. At first there was awkwardness, disappointment, and inward effort. But those feelings did not last. Once the first shock had passed, she began to attach herself more and more kindly to the man who was making Anne happy. She might never admire him in precisely the way Anne did, but she came to honor him fairly, and that was enough. Anne soon felt secure that Lady Russell meant to love him as she ought.

In this, Anne found one of the sweetest parts of her restored happiness. The past could not be undone, but it need not govern every future feeling. The woman who had once persuaded her to break her engagement would now be ready, in time, to welcome the very man she had once feared for her. That change did not erase old pain, but it softened it. Anne had never wished to triumph over Lady Russell. She had only wished to be understood by her. Now, at last, understanding was coming.

Captain Wentworth bore all these different receptions with admirable temper. He neither demanded more than was given nor seemed humbled by what was withheld. He had Anne, and because he had her freely and truly, the rest could be borne. There was no vanity in him that needed Sir Walter's praise, no weakness that required Elizabeth's smiles, and no bitterness left that wished to punish Lady Russell for old errors. Anne saw this too, and loved him the more for it. He met their smallness with patience, not because he thought it noble to endure insults, but because none of them could now separate him from Anne again.

So the engagement stood. It was not greeted with warmth in every quarter, but neither was it seriously opposed. The worst battles had been fought years earlier,

in ignorance, youth, and misjudgment. Now that same attachment returned under better conditions and with stronger rights. Anne had peace where she had once had only submission. Captain Wentworth had hope fulfilled where he had once had only resentment and loss. Their happiness was therefore not the light happiness of a story just beginning. It was the steady happiness of two people who had found their way back to the truth after long separation, and who now knew its value completely.

Part 14

Lady Russell did what Anne had hoped she would do. At first she felt real pain. She had to give up her good opinion of Mr Elliot, and she had to admit that she had long judged Captain Wentworth unfairly. This was not easy for her, because she was a serious woman and had trusted her own judgment for many years. But she loved Anne too truly to remain proud and blind.

Little by little, she accepted the truth. She saw that she had trusted appearances too much in both men. Captain Wentworth's open spirit had once seemed too quick and dangerous to her, while Mr Elliot's smooth manners had seemed safe and right. Now she had to reverse those judgments. Anne knew this inward struggle was real, and for that reason she valued Lady Russell's final kindness all the more.

Captain Wentworth, for his part, was generous. He did not ask Lady Russell to confess too much, and he did not speak bitterly of the past. He was ready to respect her for the love she had always shown Anne, even if that love had once led to a great mistake. In the same way, he was soon prepared to think warmly of Mrs Smith. She had helped Anne, and that alone was enough to give her a strong claim on his gratitude.

Mrs Smith did not lose Anne by Anne's marriage. She gained another true friend as well. Captain Wentworth used all his energy to help her recover her husband's property in the West Indies. He wrote letters, took action, and pushed through the many small difficulties that had stood in her way. In this manner, he

repaid her fully for all the good she had done, and all the good she had wished to do, for Anne.

Mrs Smith's life improved, but her happiness had never depended only on money. Better income helped her, and some improvement in health helped her too, yet even before that she had kept her natural cheerfulness. She remained lively in mind and rich in spirit. Anne loved her none the less for that, because Anne knew the value of courage that does not wait for perfect circumstances before it begins to live.

Sir Walter and Elizabeth, however, changed very little. Sir Walter had accepted the marriage because Captain Wentworth now had fortune, position, and a fine appearance. Elizabeth remained cold, though not openly hostile. Anne did not expect much more from either of them, and she was wise not to expect it. Happiness was no longer something she needed them to give.

Mr Elliot did not become more respectable after losing Anne. Instead, his connection with Mrs Clay continued in a secret and improper way. Mrs Clay, in the end, chose the younger man over the older prize she had once seemed willing to pursue. In doing so, she gave up the chance of becoming Lady Elliot, but she followed her feelings more than her ambition. Sir Walter and Elizabeth were left with the comfort of not knowing the whole truth too clearly, or at least of pretending not to know it.

For Anne, these smaller disappointments around her did not darken the center of her life. She had found again the man she had always loved. More than that, she had found him after both of them had learned what love truly costs and truly requires. Their first attachment had been warm and sincere, but it had been young. Their second union was steadier, deeper, and more secure because it had lived through time, suffering, and error.

Anne had once been forced into caution when she was too young to trust herself fully. Now she no longer yielded her future to fear. She did not become proud or defiant. She simply became quietly sure. In this way, her marriage was not just a reward after pain. It was also the completion of her own inward growth.

She was, in every sense, the same Anne as before: tender, faithful, and deeply

feeling. But now all that tenderness had its full answer in Captain Wentworth's love. He understood her worth completely, and she had the happiness of being loved not by accident, nor by fantasy, but by a man who knew her character through long trial. This was the true fulfillment of her life.

There was only one shadow left over such happiness. Captain Wentworth belonged to the navy, and the navy could at any time be called again into danger by war. Anne was proud to be a sailor's wife, and she would never have wished him to be anything else. But love like hers must always pay a price for such a profession. Even in full sunshine, there would always remain the possibility of sudden fear. Yet that was the only tax on a life that, at last, had become truly bright.