

“Persuasion”

by

Jane Austen

Adapted by

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PERSUASION

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Characters

Sir Walter Elliot

Elizabeth Elliot

Ann Elliot

Mary Elliot

Mrs Musgrove

Louisa Musgrove

Henrietta Musgrove

Lady Russell

Admiral Croft

Mrs Croft

Mr Elliot

Captain Wentworth

First performed as a costumed play-reading at the Jane Austen House
Museum, Chawton, Hampshire, U.K., September 2012

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Prologue

(The story unfolds with it being eight years before. We find lady Russell and Captain Wentworth having a heated conversation about his relationship with Ann Elliot, they are in love and wish to marry. Both Lady Russell (family friend and mentor) and Sir Walter Elliot (Ann Elliot's father) are against the match.

Captain Wentworth at that time was considered to be a poor suitor and Ann too young at 19 years old to marry a man beneath her.

Ann is now 27 years old and remains unmarried.)

(The Captain and Lady Russell are standing down stage right in the Assembly rooms. Kellynch Hall is preset down stage left with 2 chairs covered in white sheets and a little table to represent the hall being closed up while the family vacate.)

Eight years earlier

Lady R Captain Wentworth, I was hoping that I might find you, if it is convenient, I have something of the utmost importance to impart, perhaps we can talk sir?

Captain W Lady Russell. (He acknowledges her with a slight bow and some annoyance) I have an engagement

Lady R Sir, I will speak plainly. Both Sir Walter Elliot and myself have spoken on the subject of an alliance between you and

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his daughter Ann, I must tell you that we are both against the match; marriage is most certainly out of the question.

Captain W Lady Russell, I also will speak plainly. So far, I cannot see any reasonable argument against my marrying Miss Ann Elliot. I am in love with her and I promise to take the greatest care of her.

Lady R How so? Can you predict an unimaginable fortune; can you conjure riches, which may never be? Your confidence sir, cannot secure a rise in any profession.

Captain W (irritable) My confidence, my ardour, my willingness to progress to a more certain profession allows my ascension in rank. The Admiralty will soon give me a ship and this in turn can only serve to enhance my station in life which I am able to state with every fibre of my being, will give me all that I desire for me and a wife to live a most comfortable life, this I can assure you Marm. Now if you will excuse me I have an engagement if you please. (He tries to walk away)

Lady R I will have it known that I have persuaded my young friend that she is indeed too young to be thinking of taking up with just any young man who has only love on his side, and I have consulted with Sir Walter and have advised against a long engagement while a poor suitor seeks his fortune. She chooses to listen to my wishes and that of her fathers. It is my observation that your alliance can only bring about an unhappy marriage and leave her in purgatory.

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Capt W You may well have persuaded Miss Elliot against me, but you cannot persuade her not to love me or I her, true love is both constant and enduring.

Lady R I have influence with Sir Walter and his family and since the death of Lady Elliot Ann's Mother. I have taken on the role as advisor in the most arduous fashion. I can assure you Captain Wentworth that there will not be any further or future association.

Captain W (said with a quiet anger) You may consider and wish to believe that you have exerted a persuasion over Miss Elliot, but she is sensible and singular and there is none so capable. Eventually, she will exercise her right to love as she wishes...I will take my leave.

(The Captain exits, leaving Lady Russell feeling smug and well satisfied with the outcome).

(Lights cross-fade to centre stage)

Act 1 - Scene 1

Kellynch Hall

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(Lights up, it is mid morning)

(Sir Walter Elliot, Elizabeth Elliot and Ann Elliot are standing centre stage)

(It is eight years later. Sir Walter and his daughters have been advised to vacate their home due to extreme debt, they are to move to Bath. Ann is to remain behind to make the Hall ready for the new tenants, Admiral and Mrs Croft.)

(Sir Walter and his daughter Elizabeth are leaving for Bath and are giving instructions to Ann.)

Sir Walter (To his daughters) If we must quit Kellynch, it might as well be Bath as any. I have always said that Bath is incomparable, it being suitable to a Baronet. A gentleman in my position should be able to continue life, which would not be deemed as socially inferior. I must declare Ann, as a tenant, the Admiral to be the best looking sailor I have ever met. I confess, if my man were to see to his hair, I would not be ashamed of being seen with him anywhere.

Mr Shepherd has made all the arrangements and his daughter is to accompany us to Bath, she will make a most suitable companion for Elizabeth, indeed it should be a great honour and will introduce her into a society that she would otherwise not have known.

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Elizabeth I have instructed the servants Ann, make sure that the second best silver is made available to the Crofts while they are here, oh and make sure all the books and music are catalogued, the plants are sent to Lady Russell and make sure all of your rubbish is cleared out of the storeroom ... our Mother would have wished it.

Sir Walter (to Ann) Naturally, you will visit all the villagers before you own departure, as they desire it – after all it is the Elliot way. It is with great sadness that we leave Kellynch, but I dare say, we shall be greatly received, cards and invitations every day from people wishing to make themselves known to people of our birth and breeding... and connections to the nobility.

Elizabeth (to Ann) You will not be wanted in Bath any sooner than (Michaelmas, you will be of no use and of little importance. You are to Uppercross, Our sister Mary just cannot possibly do without you, but you know that. Mary always desires you to visit her when she is indisposed, I of course can do very little. I am better off in Bath with Father and of course Mrs Clay will be my constant companion. (dismissive of Ann)
The coach is here father,

Sir Walter (to Elizabeth) Yes, yes we must go. Mrs Clay...she has arrived?

Elizabeth Yes, she arrived earlier with her father, she is waiting in the coach.

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Sir Walter (said to himself) If only I had a son! (He acknowledges Ann with a wave).

(To Ann) Travel to Bath at Michaelmas Ann...with Lady Russell!

Elizabeth Mrs Clay (said off stage as she is leaving)

(Sir Walter and Elizabeth exit)

(Sir Walter Elliott and his daughter Elizabeth have already left for Bath, Lady Russell is not happy that Mrs Clay has been chosen to accompany Sir Walter. Ann is left to close the Hall. The Admiral and Mrs Croft) are to take up residency. It is late morning, There are two chairs and a little occasional table stage Left; the chairs are covered over with white sheets.)

(Lady Russell and Ann are sitting on the chairs, Ann has some books and papers in her hands, inside the book is a little paper boat from years ago. Lady Russell is visiting and is dressed in out-door clothing.)

Ann (Said with a sigh) Lady Russell, when my Mother was alive there was such method, moderation and economy in our home. We have made every recommendation in marking out a scheme of 'retrenchment'. I have to persuade myself that my Father had little choice in having to be persuaded that by adopting these regulations, in seven years he would be clear of all his debts. Although, (heavy sigh) I thought that for one moment he was having none of it. Well, we now have him

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and Elizabeth convinced, and they are now in Bath having taken a house in Camden Place (she sighs wearily)

Lady R I am so very glad sir Walter went for Bath. Mr Shepherd and I were set on the fact he had to retrench, as you know Ann, his debts are indeed extreme. Elizabeth was quite put out that I had consulted with you, but was pleased to accept the niceties of Bath. Kellynch Hall has a respectability all on its own which cannot be affected by the deductions of regulation and economy, the true dignity of Sir Walter Elliott will be very far from lessened in the eyes of sensible people, by his acting like a man of principle. He will be doing in fact, what many of our first families have already done, are doing or ought to do.

Ann I dislike Bath, having been there to school for three years, my Mother on the other hand, loved it. (Sighing wistfully). But you are right; a larger society will improve my father's spirits. (She starts flicking through the books finding a little paper boat tucked into one of the pages, she closes the book quickly and is left with strong memories of a love lost).

Lady R (watching Ann closely changes the subject). Admiral and Mrs Croft are the very best of tenants, although with the war over, there is a greater choice of tenant, Sir Walter is indeed fortunate. It was fortuitous that Mr Shepherd should meet a naval man made rich from the war and seeking a temporary home, it could not have come at a better time. Gentlemen of the Navy are well to deal with and of course with so many

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valuables at Kellynch, the house will be kept in excellent order as will the gardens and shrubberies, there are no children, and a woman without children is the very best preserver of home and furniture.

The Navy I think has done much for us and have at least an equal claim with any other set of men, for all the comforts and all the privileges which any home can give.

Ann (said with humour) My father was quite impressed with Admiral Crofts demeanour, saying that the Admiral is a 'good looking' man, "quite the best looking sailor he has ever seen". Of course he is a Rear Admiral of the White, he has a position, and with a well-spoken, gentle and shrewd wife. Mr Shepherd met him in Taunton. I believe him to be a native of Somerset, he has been serving in the West Indies for many years, and it did much in persuading my father into believing he would make a good tenant.

He was so against having a 'Sailor' in his house, he being a 'Baronet', seeing it as being a means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction and of course thinks 'a sailor grows old sooner than any other man'. (Laughs a little)

Lady R Sir Walter is wise enough to know that having an Admiral in the house would be better than a mere 'Mr...', given his situation in life - 'I have let my house to an Admiral' (statement said with humour)...sounds much more gentlemanly.

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There, all is well, the house, the grounds and furniture are now approved, terms, time and everything. When are they to take up residency?

Ann They are to take possession at Michaelmas, but I have no wish to be here at that time, as you know I'm to Uppercross to visit Mary. As Elizabeth says, Mary needs me and I will not be needed in Bath.

Lady R (quite put out) Hmmm! Mrs Clay to accompany Elizabeth in your place as a most valuable assistant, how so, are you not more eligible? You are by far the better person. I am sorry that such a measure should have been resorted to, not part of the plan at all. Apart from being your Father's Lawyer's daughter, what attributes does Mrs Clay possess?

Ann My father is always making remarks as to her freckles and has been unkind in her absence, but he considers that she is young and well - looking, with pleasing manners, is tolerably handsome and an acute mind.

Lady R (aggrieved) I regard it as an affront to you Ann, that Mrs Clay could be of use, while you none, is a very sore aggravation indeed.

Ann Although my Father is single, there is nothing to concern us, he will not be lured into marriage with a lawyer's daughter, least of all to someone with personal defects, he abominates

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them. (Said with some humour, trying to make light of the situation)

Lady R (deeply sighing and said rising) I feel the break-up of your family exceedingly Ann. Your families' respectability has been as dear to me as my own. I have always done my very best to be an advisor since your dear Mother's departure.

Ann (said rising) Well, I am glad it is all over, I will now go to Mary, she needs me, as always!

Lady R I have engagements and will be away from Kellynch for a time, when I return we will travel to Bath together.

Ann Yes, thank you Lady Russell. (Said deep in thought). (She kisses Lady Russell on the cheek) (Lady Russell exits). Ann reopens the book and takes out the paper boat.

(Ann exits S/R - lights down)

(Strike Kellynch)