Persuasion

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JANE AUSTEN

Jane Austen was the seventh child of the parish rector in the town of Steventon, where she and her family resided until moving to Bath in 1801. Though her parents were members of the English gentry, they remained relatively poor. Modest to a fault about the value of her work, Jane Austen nevertheless produced some of the enduring masterpieces of English literature, including the novels *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*. Her novels were published anonymously until after her death, when her authorship became known. While it was not unheard of for women to publish under their own names in Austen's lifetime, it was still a rarity. Despite the fact that her books focus on the intricate rituals of courtship and marriage among the British middle class, Austen herself remained single throughout her life, preferring the life of a writer over that of a wife and hostess.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Austen's novels are famous for the way they seem to exist in a small, self-contained universe. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Austen's depiction of life in the tranquil English countryside takes place at the same time when England was fighting for its life against the threat of Napoleon, and all of Europe was embroiled in war and political chaos.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Between the late 18th and early 19th centuries, English literature underwent a dramatic transition. The 18th century had seen the rise of the novel in the works of writers like Daniel Defoe (*Moll Flanders*) and Samuel Richardson (*Pamela*). These novels focused on broad social issues of morality and domestic manners. With the turn of the century and the rise of Romanticism, however, the novel began to explore human relationships with a greater degree of emotional complexity. Neither a Classicist nor a Romantic, Jane Austen is perhaps best thought of as a pioneering figure in the development of the novel, providing the bridge from the often didactic novels of an earlier era to the great works of psychological realism of the Victorian period by writer such as George Eliot and Thomas Hardy.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Persuasion*
- **When Written:** 1816-1817
- **Where Written:** Chawton, England
- **When Published:** 1818
- **Literary Period:** Classicism / Romanticism
- **Genre:** Novel of manners
- **Setting:** Kellynch Hall, Uppercross Manor, Lyme, and Bath (all in England).
- **Climax:** Mrs. Smith's revelation of Mr. Elliot's past and scheme to marry Anne to become heir of the Kellynch baronetcy.
- **Antagonist:** There is no real antagonist in the novel, as Anne's struggle is primarily the negotiation of societal expectations and personal conviction regarding whom she should marry. However, there are a number of characters who fail to appreciate or support Anne, such as her father Sir Walter and sister Elizabeth, and Mr. Elliot conspires to marry her to obtain the Kellynch baronetcy.
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Austen's last novel. Austen wrote *Persuasion* while dying from what was possibly Addison's disease; she finished alterations of its final chapters a year before her death. Some critics have drawn parallels between Austen's own life situation as an unmarried "spinster" and that of her protagonist, Anne, and that there are glimpses of a sorrow about mortality that are attributable to the context of her illness in this last novel. Whatever the case, the novel does seem to possess a more elegiac and meditative tone than some of Austen's earlier, spritely works such as *Emma*

A Second Spring. *Persuasion* is Austen's only work that engages love in later stages of life; Anne Elliot, at twenty-eight, nears the age of spinsterhood for a woman in her era and has "lost her bloom." Her romance with Captain Wentworth commences in a "second spring," years after they first fall in love and then fall out. Similarly, the characters of Captain Benwick, Mr. Elliot, and Mrs. Clay are all seeking a second love after the loss of their first fiancée, wife, and husband respectively. Admiral and Mrs. Croft are also one of the rare examples of an older couple with a model marriage in Austen's work.

PLOT SUMMARY

The novel opens with the vain Sir Walter, baronet of **Kellynch** Hall, poring over the Elliot family history. His wife passed away fourteen years ago, leaving behind three daughters: the youngest daughter, Mary, is married to the wealthy Charles Musgrove. Proud and beautiful Elizabeth is the eldest and her

father's favorite; Anne is gentle and sweet, but often overlooked by her father and sister. Their mother's best friend, Lady Russell, helped Sir Walter raise his children. She remains a close and trusted family friend and maternal figure for Anne. The Elliots are an aristocratic, land-owning family. They have fallen into debt due to Sir Walter's extravagant spending, and under the counsel of Lady Russell and Mr. Shepherd the family lawyer they rent their estate to Admiral and Mrs. Croft and move to Bath.

Admiral and Mrs. Croft are a respectable, well-off, and well-mannered **Navy** couple of good character. Despite Sir Walter's initial reservations about the Navy as a profession that socially elevates lowborn men, he is pleased to have tenants of respectable social standing. The arrival of Mrs. Croft stirs powerful memories for Anne, as she is the sister of Captain Wentworth. Eight years ago, Anne and Captain Wentworth fell in love and were engaged to be married; however, Lady Russell, who believed the match to be foolish and unsuitable, as Captain Wentworth had no fortune or rank, persuaded Anne to break off the engagement. Anne anticipates seeing him in the country again.

While Sir Walter, Elizabeth, and Mrs. Clay (Elizabeth's close friend and a widow of lower rank) travel to Bath, Anne visits her sister Mary at Uppercross to help her out and keep her company. Mary is self-absorbed and complains frequently; her husband, Charles, is good-natured and patient. The rest of the Musgrove family live nearby at the Great House; Anne finds them refreshingly unpretentious, cheerful, and warm. Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove have two grown daughters, Henrietta and Louisa.

Captain Wentworth arrives to visit his sister, Mrs. Croft, and quickly becomes a favorite among the Musgroves. He treats Anne with cold indifference, leading her to the painful conclusion that he no longer loves her. He flirts instead with Louisa and Henrietta, who are quite smitten with him. The party meets Captain and Mrs. Harville, friends of Captain Wentworth, and Captain Benwick at Lyme. On one of their walks, they encounter a gentleman who openly admires Anne—he is later discovered to be Mr. Elliot, Sir Walter's estranged heir. When Louisa takes a bad fall because of her stubborn impulsiveness, Anne directs the others to care for her. The Harvilles kindly nurse Louisa over the next few months; Captain Wentworth feels responsible for the accident and stays for a time in Lyme.

Anne and Lady Russell join Sir Walter and Elizabeth in Bath. They learn that Mr. Elliot is in Bath and made great efforts to reconcile with the family. He is universally charming and continues to express great admiration for Anne, who finds him sensible and well-mannered though neither open nor warm. Admiral and Mrs. Croft arrive in Bath with the surprising news that Louisa is engaged to Captain Benwick and Henrietta to Charles Hayter, her cousin. Captain Wentworth is completely unattached; he arrives in Bath soon after, and it becomes evident that he is jealous of Mr. Elliot's attentions to Anne. Lady Russell believes Mr. Elliot to be a perfect match for her beloved Anne, but Anne remains suspicious of Mr. Elliot's past. She continues to harbor a steadfast and unwavering love for Captain Wentworth.

During her time at Bath, Anne reconnects with an old school friend, Mrs. Smith, who has fallen on hard times. The crippled, impoverished, and widowed Mrs. Smith informs her of Mr. Elliot's dark past: he betrayed Mrs. Smith's husband and wronged Mrs. Smith financially, and he now plans to marry Anne because he is fearful that he will lose the baronetcy if Mrs. Clay marries Sir Walter, and the marriage to Anne would ensure his inheritance. Anne is appalled that she was almost persuaded to marry Mr. Elliot by Lady Russell.

Captain Wentworth writes a letter professing his continued devotion for Anne. Anne is shaken and ecstatic; they renew their vows and engagement to each other. Eight years in the navy have elevated Captain Wentworth in fortune and social rank; he is now an eligible match for the daughter of a foolish and spendthrift baronet. Sir Walter poses no objection to their marriage, and Lady Russell also comes to accept and befriend Captain Wentworth. Mr. Elliot is shocked and disappointed; he leaves Bath with Mrs. Clay, whose affections he has turned away from Sir Walter. Anne and Captain Wentworth finally enjoy a mature marriage with an appreciation and tenderness enhanced by their long years apart.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Anne Elliot – The protagonist of the novel, Anne Elliot is the sensible, gentle, and capable middle daughter of the aristocratic Elliot family at Kellynch Hall. Unlike her vain and spendthrift father, she possesses a calm mind and kind heart resembling her deceased mother. She is often overlooked by her superficial father and sister, who prize beauty, wealth, and blood above subtler character graces. While Anne also possesses a sense of family pride, it is moderated by her recognition of the deeper dignity of integrity, honor, and charity. Though Anne harbors a steadfast and passionate love for Captain Wentworth, she yields to the persuasion of her mentor and friend, Lady Russell, prioritizing duty and prudence in breaking off the engagement with her beloved. She poses a mature, compassionate, and levelheaded contrast to the younger Musgrove daughters, as she balances the humble consideration of others' feelings and advice with her own dedication to principle, practicality, and duty.

Captain Frederick Wentworth – The love interest of Anne Elliot, Captain Wentworth is a passionate, confident, and good-hearted naval officer who makes his own fortune and rank

through the Navy. Though he is initially indignant and angry with what he perceives to be Anne's "weak will" and "ill-usage" of him in breaking off their engagement, he comes to appreciate her careful consideration of duty and recognize the error of his stubborn pride in separating them. His view of what the most important virtues in a woman are change throughout the novel, as he first prizes firmness of character above all else and later realizes the virtue of flexibility and conscientiousness.

Mr. William Elliot – The cousin of Anne Elliot and Sir Walter's heir, Mr. Elliot is a duplicitous and charming gentleman. After making his fortune from his first marriage, he seeks the baronetcy that he previously scorned by marrying Anne. Although he makes himself agreeable to everyone and is admired by Anne herself, she rightly suspects his past—one that involves considerable greed, callousness, and even cruelty.

Lady Russell – Anne's friend and mentor, Lady Russell served as a maternal figure after her best friend Lady Elliot, Anne's real mother, passed away. Lady Russell is a good-hearted and sensible woman, though she possesses her own prejudices in favor of the aristocratic class that she herself comes from. She advises Anne to break off her engagement with Captain Wentworth, who she believes is below Anne.

Elizabeth Elliot – The eldest Elliot daughter, Elizabeth resembles her father in good looks and vanity. She is the baronet's favorite child, and she possesses a similar sense of self-importance and indifference to Anne. Despite her beauty and superficial charms, she remains unmarried at the end of the novel; there is some suggestion that her pride has prevented her from acknowledging anyone to be an eligible match, except her father's heir, Mr. Elliot, who has no desire to marry her.

Mary Elliot Musgrove – Mary is the youngest Elliot daughter and married to Charles Musgrove with two children. While she is not as vain and unjust to Anne's merits as Elizabeth, she does possess a strong dose of "Elliot pride." Petulant and self-absorbed, she often imagines herself sick or slighted, and she is a rather irresponsible mother. Her family often finds her complaints and arrogance wearisome.

Charles Musgrove – The husband of Mary, Charles is the eldest son of the respectable Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove, whose landed property and general importance are second only to Sir Walter's in the region. Although Anne was his first choice, he good-naturedly endures his wife's temperament and possesses a number of other amiable qualities, though he spends most of his time on sport.

Louisa Musgrove – Louisa is Charles's younger sister and the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove. Just returned from boarding school, she is generally accomplished and carefree. She is exuberant and headstrong, but also very impressionable in matters of the heart, as she easily shifts her passions from Captain Wentworth to Captain Benwick.

Mr. & Mrs. Musgrove – The parents of Charles, Henrietta, and Louisa, Mr. and Mrs. Musgroves are a happy and homey couple. A landed family second in their parish only to the Elliots, they live in the Great House at Uppercross. Unlike the Elliots, however, their household is cheerful, bustling, and unpretentious: they value the happiness of their children of their ascension through social climbing.

Captain Benwick – The friend of Captain Wentworth from the navy, Captain Benwick is scholarly and reserved. He was engaged to Captain Harville's sister, Fanny, who passed away while he was at sea. Despite his melancholy manner, he gets over his mourning with some help from Anne and pretty soon afterwards falls in love with Louisa Musgrove.

Admiral and Mrs. Croft – Admiral and Mrs. Croft are a warm and well-matched couple, who move into Kellynch Hall after Sir Walter and Elizabeth depart for Bath due to debts. Mrs. Croft accompanies the Admiral on all of his journeys at sea, and it is clear that they have a loving and equitable marriage; they are one of the few models of real marital happiness in Austen's novel.

Mrs. Clay – Mr. Shepherd's daughter and Elizabeth's good friend. She is a widow of low birth and rather unattractive. However, she knows how to flatter those of higher rank and wheedles her way into Elizabeth and Sir Walter's intimate circle; Anne worries that she may even work her way into Sir Walter's affections through skillful social manipulation.

Lady Elliot – Sir Walter's wife and Anne's mother, Lady Elliot is already deceased at the start of the novel. She was a gentle, kind, and capable woman who anxiously cared for her children and softened her husband's flaws during her lifetime. She relied on her best friend, Lady Russell, for advice and support.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Sir Walter Elliot – The baronet of Kellynch Hall, Sir Walter is the father of Elizabeth, Anne, and Mary Elliot. He is superficial and vain, spending more money than he can afford to sustain the aristocratic lifestyle he feels entitled to and judging others on their looks and lineage.

Henrietta Musgrove – Henrietta is Charles's younger sister and the elder of the Musgrove daughters. Like her sister, she is young and cheerful. She vacillates between her cousin Charles Hayter and the charms of the newly arrived Captain Wentworth.

Charles Hayter – The cousin and suitor of Henrietta Musgrove, Charles Hayter belongs to a lower social standing than the Musgroves because his mother—Mrs. Musgrove's sister—married less well. More scholarly than the rest of his family, he is pursuing a profession in the church.

Mr. Shepherd – Mr. Shepherd is the Sir Walter's family advisor and lawyer. He gives financial counsel to the Elliots when it becomes clear that they are deep in debt.

Mrs. Smith – Formerly Miss Hawkins, Mrs. Smith is Anne's girlhood friend from school. Impoverished, crippled, and widowed, Mrs. Smith nonetheless sustains an optimistic and good-natured spirit in the midst of her trials. She also provides a critical revelation of Mr. Elliot's dark past and duplicitous character.

Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret – Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret are the Elliot family's Irish cousins of noble lineage. They are uninteresting and unremarkable individuals, but Sir Walter and Elizabeth desire them as connections because of their aristocratic associations.

Captain and Mrs. Harville – Naval friends of Captain Wentworth, Captain and Mrs. Harville are a warm and hospitable couple, who welcome the Musgroves to Lyme during their visit and nurse Louisa after her accident.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

STATUS AND SOCIAL CLASS

Persuasion, like many of Austen's novels, is a study in 18th century English society, and its nuances of class rigidity and social mobility. Status and independence are composed of a combination of wealth, ancestry, and occupation: certain characters achieve independence through marrying into wealth, as is the case with Mr. William Elliot's first marriage, while others such as Captain Frederick Wentworth achieve status and wealth through climbing the Naval ranks. Sir Walter Elliot prides himself on his "ancient and respectable" lineage, baronetcy, and wealthy estate; he is greatly preoccupied that his manner of living and ensuring that the people with whom his family associates will befit his high status, although these concerns lead him into excessive debt and undiscerning connections.

Considerations of class also affect characters of less vanity and more prudence, such as Lady Russell and the protagonist Anne Elliot. Lady Russell judiciously advises Anne about the importance of marrying a man who matches her station and can adequately provide for her, and, based on this counsel, Anne conscientiously refrains from marrying the man she loves. Austen's novel—for all of its romantic wisdom about matching temperaments and love in marriage—also highlights and supports the importance of "marrying well" as a concern that none of the characters can escape, and one that inevitably takes into considerations of class and wealth.

Status and social class both motivate and restrict the actions that characters are able to take in fulfilling their desires. From the start of the novel, Sir Walter Elliot's vanity and luxurious spending in order to live according to his status leads him into financial debt and require him to rent his estate. Mr. William Elliot is motivated to marry Anne out of a lately developed appreciation for his inheritance and baronetcy. Captain Wentworth strikes out to sea in order to make his fortunes through the Navy.

One of the most striking examples of how status and class influence agency is in the tragedy of Mrs. Smith, Anne's girlhood friend who is crippled by debt, widowhood, and illness. In the eyes of society, she has essentially nothing and relies on the more privileged Anne's kindness, friendship, and charity.

MARRIAGE

Written in the last years of Austen's life, ***Persuasion*** is arguably the author's most mature and sober marriage plot. The novel critiques the heady impulses of youth displayed by Louisa Musgrove in favor of the more quiet and prudent considerations of Anne Elliot in matters of marriage and romance. For women, who were often barred from owning property and faced significant limitations in employment, marriage was particularly critical as both the expected social norm and the often necessary means of attaining financial security and social status. Even the arrogant and beautiful Elizabeth Elliot, who is secure in her fortune and her father's love, finds herself unsettled and anxious over becoming a spinster at the age of twenty-nine; nonetheless, her pride rules out all potential suitors and she remains the only single Elliot daughter at the novel's conclusion.

Unlike many of Austen's other novels of youthful first romance, the focal drama of the narrative revolves around Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth, whose early romance was ended under the persuasion of prudence, yet which rekindles seven years later after deeper consideration and appreciation of their suitability for each other. The passing of these seven years also changes the reality of Anne's marital prospects (she's no longer young) and perspective, even as it renders this novel one of Austen's more mature narratives. At the same time, Anne's prudent concerns about social class and wealth in marriage by no means disappear during these years, yet the passage of time allows Wentworth to rise to Anne's fortune and status. Nonetheless, those concerns are put into perspective, as Anne and Wentworth's match is ultimately one of developed love *and* recognition of each other's merits—Captain Wentworth, in particular, learns to prize the very prudence and humility that he once resented in Anne.

Austen's view of marriage is both romantic and realistic, prudent and nuanced, rather like her character Anne. Austen in the novel illustrates how marriage is an agent of social change for both men and women. Options are influenced *by* the characters' status and class (as when characters reject or

pursue matches to consolidate their social standing), even as marriage also *influences* status and class. Sir Walter Elliot approves of his daughter Mary Elliot's marriage to Charles Musgrove, because he regards the latter as from the best family in the county second only to his own. Yet although Sir Walter Elliot believes Mary's lineage places the advantage of the match to be on Charles's side, we see that Charles's superior good nature and patience with his wife's pettiness render the real advantage to her: Austen affirms the greater importance of character qualities over status in marital happiness.

GENDER INEQUALITY

Persuasion reveals the limited sphere of choice available to women in Austen's era. In the case of the female characters, marriage represents the most viable option for a woman to live a good life. Women's influence, in this sense, lies largely in their relation to men—to attract, reject, and accept their proposals of marriage. The comparatively sober tone of the novel results in part from the protagonist's reality that she is past her prime; even Lady Russell, who once advised her to refrain from marrying below her station, grows concerned for Anne Elliot as she remains single years later.

There is an undeniable double standard around gender in the novel. Sir Walter Elliot and Lady Russell are both widowed, yet the narrator tells us that society would regard it as normal for Sir Walter to remarry, even as it discourages second marriages for women. Were it not for Lady Russell's great wealth and position, she would herself be socially vulnerable as a widow. The impoverished widow Mrs. Smith reveals the plight of women who are unsupported by men or fortune.

The divergent paths of Captain Wentworth and Anne Elliot after the dissolution of their early romance also illustrate gender limitations: Captain Wentworth is able to leave the country, make his fortune, and return with even more viable marriage prospects. Indeed, when he returns to England he becomes the object of admiration of not one but three women: Louisa Musgrove, Henrietta Musgrove, and Anne Elliot. Anne, in contrast, "loses her bloom" and has no resources of mobility or occupation to heal and grow but the slow passing of time—which also reduces her marital prospects.

PERSUASION

The novel begins and returns repeatedly to the question of whether it is wise to be influenced by the concerns and counsel of others, or to remain fixed in one's convictions and impulses. Anne Elliot reveals her disposition for the former when she dissolves her relationship with Captain Wentworth on the advice of her good friend and mentor Lady Russell. Seven years later, Anne experiences unrelenting regret over her decision and becomes convinced that she would have been happier marrying Captain Wentworth as his predictions for his fortunes come true—suggesting that she has learned to favor romance over her initial prudence at her friend's persuasion.

However, the narrative ultimately complicates the virtues of a headstrong conviction in favor of the value of persuasion. When Captain Wentworth returns, he extols the virtue of a woman who will not listen to others but forges her own way—alluding with some bitterness to his experience with Anne's willingness to be persuaded from marrying him by Lady Russell. After observing Louisa Musgrove's disregard for the advice of others lead to great distress, though, he revises his opinion: such heedlessness reflects not only a foolish and arrogant inattention to the wisdom of others, but also fails to prove any true steadfastness in love. Ultimately, Anne's receptivity to others comes to seem as a complement to her persevering love for Captain Wentworth, who in turn becomes persuaded of Anne's merit.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE NAVY

The Navy is discussed by many characters in the novel, from the admiring Louisa and Henrietta to the more pragmatically appreciative Anne. As a vehicle of social mobility, it offers the potential for men from less prominent social standing, through hard work and merit, to climb the ranks of status *and* earn their fortune—two components that grant men distinction and importance in Austen's society. For this reason, the novel's conclusion references the Navy as possessing "domestic virtue" as well as national importance. Captain Wentworth's marriage to Anne is enabled largely by his ability to make his fortune and rank through the navy.

For the very same reason that the Navy represents socioeconomic mobility through feats of distinction and valor, Sir Walter regards it with wariness and distaste. Sir Walter, as landed gentry, desires a society fixed by aristocratic bloodlines. He has great pride in his family lineage and in his estate, Kellynch Hall, and he recognizes the threat that those who rise through marrying money (like Mr. Elliot's first marriage) and those who climb the ranks of Navy pose to his own conservative vision of social hierarchy. In general, Austen seems to support the positive and romantic notion of the Navy as a valid, adventurous, and more meritocratic means of social distinction—a symbol of private as well as public virtue.

KELLYNCH HALL

Kellynch Hall is the Elliot family estate and a symbol of the prestige of the baronetcy. As the family home, it is holds a special significance not only for the vain baronet, Sir Walter, and Elizabeth, but also considerable sentimental value for Anne, who is not insensible of the value of good family.

Nonetheless, Kellynch becomes the site of social change, as Sir Walter must rent it out in order to pay back the debts he has acquired from the extravagant expenses he felt entitled to as aristocracy. That Kellynch Hall then becomes the home of a wealthy naval couple, Admiral and Mrs. Croft, suggests that the social climate is changing for the aristocracy and opportunities for social mobility through meritorious work are opening up.

THE BARONETAGE

The Baronetage is Sir Walter's favorite book, because it records the families of British nobility—"the history and rise of all the ancient and respectable families"—among which the Elliots are included. The beginning of the novel finds him vainly poring over the book with the full anticipation that his eldest and favorite daughter, Elizabeth, will elevate the family through a marriage that he can proudly record in The Baronetage. However, many events follow that suggest the decline of the aristocracy: Sir Walter's debts force him to rent out Kellynch Hall and remove to Bath, and the baronet's heir, Mr. Elliot, rejects Elizabeth twice. Indeed, Elizabeth is the only daughter that remains single throughout the novel. On the other hand, Captain Wentworth, whom Sir Walter once scorned as an utterly degrading match for Anne, has risen in rank and fortune through the Navy such that he is a perfectly eligible match for the daughter of the indebted and silly baronet. All of these changes lead to a shift in mentality that manifests an increasing flexibility in what constitutes good society. The extent of these changes are evident at the close of the novel, when Sir Walter finally writes in the marriage of Anne and Captain Wentworth "with a very good grace . . . in the volume of honour."

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Publications edition of *Persuasion* published in 1997.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character; vanity of person and of situation. . . . He considered the blessing of beauty as inferior only to the blessing of a baronetcy; and Sir Walter Elliot, who united these gifts, was the constant object of his warmest respect and devotion.

Related Characters: Sir Walter Elliot

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

In the first chapter of the novel, Austen introduces us to the key themes: the importance of marriage, and marriage's relationship with class. If there's an ironclad law of Austen's world, it's that people from high-class families must make high-class marriages--class must perpetuate itself. Sir Walter Elliot, the patriarch of the family, and the product of generations of high-class marriages, loves himself because he's handsome, but more importantly because he comes from a noble family. It makes no difference that Walter is a gambler and has little money left; class is its own currency.

In this searingly ironic passage, Austen makes it crystal-clear that she's making fun of Elliot: he's clearly a narcissistic fool who loves himself more than he cares for anyone else. And yet, as critics have often pointed out, it's not clear if Austen really has an alternative to the system she's making fun of. Austen mocks Walter, and yet she also seems to follow the same rules that Walter respects, showing how her characters achieve happiness and fulfillment mostly by getting married off to wealthy, high-class people.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ Yes; [the Navy] is in two points offensive to me; I have two strong grounds of objection to it. First, as a means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of; and secondly, as it cuts up a man's youth and vigour most horribly.

Related Characters: Sir Walter Elliot (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Walter, as pompous and foolish as ever, tells us a lot about his character in this passage. Walter and his family are trying to decide what to do about renting their place out; Mrs. Clay (Elizabeth's friend) suggests that they rent it out to Navy men who've come back from active duty. Walter

objects to such an idea because he disapproves of the Navy altogether. As far as he's concerned, the Navy is bad because 1) it makes handsome, youthful men ugly and worn out, and 2) it allows low-class people to rise to high-class positions in society.

In other words, Walter's reasons for hating the navy are basically the same as his reasons for loving himself. Walter is so slavishly devoted to the ideal of the English aristocrat that he can't stand the idea of any kind of meritocracy; the idea that a person should attain success because of his own merits, not because of his family tree.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Anne Elliot, with all her claims of birth, beauty, and mind, to throw herself away at nineteen; involve herself at nineteen in an engagement with a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, but in the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connexions to secure even his farther rise in that profession; would be, indeed, a throwing away, which [Lady Russell] grieved to think of! . . . It must not be, if by any fair interference of friendship, any representations from one who had almost a mother's love, and mother's rights, it would be prevented.

Related Characters: Anne Elliot, Lady Russell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Austen describes how Lady Russell, the close friend of Anne's late mother, endeavors to break off a possible marriage between Anne and her lover, Captain Wentworth. Wentworth was a likable, talented man, but he was also relatively poor, and didn't have a reliable career track--therefore, he wasn't a suitable match for Anne. Lady Russell loves Anne, but she thinks of herself as a businesswoman, one could say: her goal is to ensure the survival of Anne's family name and reputation, and to ensure that Anne is provided for over the course of her entire life. Wentworth, with his low income and uncertain future, can't give Anne what she deserves.

Austen gives us a great example of "free indirect discourse" in this passage. Austen is writing in the third person, but she's clearly writing from the point of view of one of the characters, namely Lady Russell (you can almost hear her voice, offering excuses for breaking off the engagement).

The effect of this free indirect discourse is to give us a window into Lady Russell's mind: we see that she's a sincere character who genuinely loves and is looking out for Anne, even if she's perhaps a little too reliant on the myths of aristocratic superiority--and if her role of motherly "persuasion" ultimately ends up hurting Anne.

❝ More than seven years were gone since this little history of sorrowful interest had reached its close, and time had softened down much, perhaps nearly all of peculiar attachment to him,--but she had been too dependent on time alone; no aid had been given in change of place . . . or in any novelty or enlargement of society.

Related Characters: Captain Frederick Wentworth, Anne Elliot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Austen summarizes the significance of Anne's failed engagement to Captain Wentworth: over the seven years that have passed since Lady Russell broke off all possibility of their getting married, Anne has grown rather despondent. When she met Wentworth, she was a young, energetic woman--now, because she's been stuck in the same place surrounded by the same people, she feels dull and tired. She's mostly gotten over Wentworth, but nobody else has come along to propose to her, and so she's beginning to despair that she'll never find a husband.

The passage is a sad reminder of the limited options available to women during Austen's lifetime. Anne is clearly a bright and intelligent woman, but her current purpose in life is to get married to a talented, wealthy man, perpetuating her family's genealogy and assuring that she'll be provided for as she grows older. As a result, Anne is imprisoned in the same place, forced to watch as her sister gets married and her own beauty fades. As ever with Austen, it's not clear what, exactly, Austen would *do* to help Anne if she could, but there's still an undeniable sadness that hangs over this passage, suggesting that Austen sees the injustice of Anne's situation, and of all English women's situations.

Anne, at seven and twenty, thought very differently from what she had been made to think at nineteen.—She did not blame Lady Russell, she did not blame herself for having been guided by her; but she felt that were any young person, in similar circumstances, to apply to her for counsel, they would never receive any of such certain immediate wretchedness, such uncertain future good. . . . She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older—the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning.

Related Characters: Anne Elliot, Lady Russell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

Austen describes the supposed "unnaturalness" of the chronology of Anne's concept of love. Anne wanted to get married to a handsome, likable man when she was only 19 years old, but because Lady Russell persuaded her to break off the engagement, the result of the interrupted courtship is that Anne learned the hard rules of marriage early on, and is only now learning about love and romance. As a teenager, she saw the economic rules that governed marriage--only now is she coming to feel truly romantic on account of her loneliness.

The passage is interesting because it suggests a central problem that the novel will have to correct: there's a basic disagreement between the characters' notions of love and their notions of what is practical. Furthermore, the passage might suggest that in this society, it really *is* important to understand finance and the "hard rules" before falling in love--most people fall in love too early and then have to wise up about money and real estate (particularly women, who in Austen's world have few other options of making money or rising in class). Anne, on the other hand, wised up early--but now that the groundwork has been laid, she is learning to focus on romance.

Chapter 5 Quotes

Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove were a very good sort of people; friendly and hospitable, not much educated and not at all elegant. . . . Anne always contemplated them as some of the happiest creatures of her acquaintance; but still, saved as we all are by some comfortable feelings of superiority from wishing for the possibility of exchange, she would not have given up her own more elegant and cultivated mind for all their enjoyments; and envied them nothing but that seemingly perfect good understanding and agreement together, that good-humoured mutual affection, of which she had known so little herself with either of her sisters.

Related Characters: Mr. & Mrs. Musgrove, Anne Elliot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, we meet the Musgroves, the second-most prestigious family in the parish where the Elliots live. Anne knows the Musgroves well, and secretly admires them because they're down-to-earth and seem not to care particularly about aristocracy or marriage. Where Anne has to be bossed into marrying the "right man," the Musgroves' children seem to get few if any real directions from their parents.

Anne's attitude toward the Musgroves is fascinating: she admires them but would never, ever switch places with them. Anne sometimes wishes that she could think of her own happiness instead of focusing on economics and honoring the family name. And yet she's also conscious of her "noble burden"--she *has* to find a suitable husband in order to honor her family's history, even if doing so makes her life a little sadder. Furthermore, she subconsciously assumes that her own mind is more "elegant and cultivated" because of her birth and heritage. Anne isn't free from her father's selfish, aristocratic bias, however much she might want to be.

Chapter 6 Quotes

Anne had not wanted this visit to Uppercross, to learn that a removal from one set of people to another, though at a distance of only three miles, will often include a total change of conversation, opinion, and idea. She had never been staying there before, without being struck by it, or without wishing that other Elliots could have her advantage in seeing how unknown, or unconsidered there, were the affairs which at Kellynch-hall were treated as of such general publicity and pervading interest.

Related Characters: Anne Elliot

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Anne describes some of the major differences between life in her own household and life among the Musgrove family. The big difference between the Elliots and the Musgroves is a social title: the Musgroves have less of a title, and therefore they seem to take life more easily: they don't put a lot of importance in whom their children marry. Anne visits the Musgroves and is immediately impressed and surprised by the total absence of talk about aristocracy and genealogy--the talk that dominates life in her own home.

Anne is surprised by the Musgroves' easy manner, and yet it's not clear if Anne truly *envies* them. As unhappy as her pursuit of a "proper" marriage has made her, she seems to consider it her duty to find a proper husband nonetheless. And perhaps her visit to the Musgroves reminds her of how much "easier" (only in some senses, obviously) her life could have been if she hadn't been born into an aristocratic family.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ O; the years which had destroyed [Anne's] youth and bloom had only given [Captain Wentworth] a more glowing, manly, open look, in no respect lessoning his personal advantages. . . . It was now his object to marry. He was rich, and being turned on shore, fully intended to settle as soon as he could be properly tempted; actually looing round, ready to fall in love with all the speed which a clear head and quick taste could allow.

Related Characters: Anne Elliot, Captain Frederick Wentworth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

When Captan Wentworth and Anne reunite, the difference between their lives over the past few years couldn't be clearer. Anne has felt herself to grow less beautiful and vivacious, while Captain Wentworth has only become handsomer and more energetic. The gender double standard here is clear: Anne is a woman, and therefore has to remain with her family, growing old and lonely (and, presumably, less attractive), while Wentworth is a man, meaning that he gets to pursue a career and travel around the world.

There's also an amusing feature of this passage--the fact that Austen makes it clear that Wentworth *wants* to fall in love as soon as he can manage to. It's odd to imagine someone *planning* to fall in love, but the fact that Wentworth plans to do so reinforces the businesslike, regular nature of romance and courtship in Austen's society. Wentworth is of age, newly wealthy, and he has some downtime: therefore he *must* marry someone.

❝ Captain Wentworth had not forgiven Anne Elliot. She had used him ill; deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shewn a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure. She had given him up to oblige others. It had been the effect of over-persuasion. It had been weakness and timidity.

Related Characters: Anne Elliot, Captain Frederick Wentworth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Austen plays with the differences between free indirect discourse and third person narration to create a genuine ambiguity around Captain Wentworth's personality. Wentworth, we're told, has returned to Anne's life behaving coldly and distantly: he seems not to forgive her for breaking off the engagement. In Wentworth's mind, it would seem, Anne has proven herself unworthy of him because of how easily she relented to Lady Russell's persuasion--she chose to please others rather than follow her heart.

Some ambiguity then arises over whether the passage is Anne's *impression* of what Wentworth must be thinking, or whether it's Austen's description of what the Captain *is* thinking. it's genuinely difficult to tell: Austen uses both free indirect discourse and regular third-person narration, and therefore it's unclear whether or not we should "trust" the passage. The ambiguity in Wentworth's character in crucial to the plot of the novel: in essence, we'll spend the next 200 pages deciding whether or not to trust this quotation--is the Captain really angry with and disappointed in Anne, or is he

still in love with her, or both?

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ Once so much to each other! Now nothing! . . . With the exception of Admiral and Mrs. Croft, who seemed particularly attached and happy, (Anne could allow no other exception even among the married couples) there could have been no two hearts so open, no tastes so similar, no feelings so in unison, no countenances so beloved. Now they were as strangers; nay, worse than strangers, for they could never become acquainted. It was a perpetual estrangement.

Related Characters: Anne Elliot, Captain Frederick Wentworth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Austen allows the distance that's grown between Anne and the Captain to truly sink in. As always, it's hard to tell if what we're reading is the "truth," or if it's only Anne's personal impression of the truth. Anne seems to believe that when she and Wentworth were younger, they were as close as two human beings could be: they shared all the same dreams and secrets. Now that the engagement has long been broken off and the Captain is angry with Anne, they're cold and distant with one another.

The passage is a deft example of the phenomenon Austen described in a previous quote: Anne has learned the "hard rules" of marriage early on, and it's only now that she's learning about love. One wonders if Anne loved Wentworth as much when she was 19 as she does *now*--her loneliness and isolation have made her desire the Captain all the more strongly, and she wishes that he could forgive her for ending the engagement so unexpectedly.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ It is the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character, that no influence over it can be depended on. . . . Let those who would be happy be firm.—Here is a nut. To exemplify,—a beautiful glossy nut, which blessed with original strength, has outlived all the storms of autumn. Not a puncture, not a weak spot any where.

Related Characters: Captain Frederick Wentworth (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Anne overhears Captain Wentworth talking to Louisa about the importance of resolution and firmness of opinion. Wentworth, a Navy man through and through, believes that Henrietta should commit to her potential suitor, Charles Hayter, more decisively. He compares a good, firm human being to a strong nut: like the nut, a firm person can't be "cracked" or whittled down, and therefore survives over the years.

Wentworth's analogy tells us a lot about his character and his relationship to Anne. Wentworth can't understand how somebody could promise to get engaged to a man and then break off the engagement suddenly; thus, he can't forgive Anne for ending their engagement because of the "persuasion" of another. While Wentworth frames his decision in terms of decisiveness and firmness, his male bias is also clear. Wentworth has a lot more freedom than his female contemporaries, and therefore it's easier for him to commit to one thing; he has nobody else to please, no second opinions to consult, and far fewer economic and social boundaries to consider. Anne, on the other hand, simply *can't* be firm with anyone: too many other people control her destiny. It's Wentworth's failure to understand the realities of women's lives that makes him unable to forgive Anne.

❝ Yes—he had done it. She was in the carriage, and felt that he had placed her there, that his will and his hands had done it, that she owed it to his perception of her fatigue, and his resolution to giver her rest. . . . It was a remainder of former sentiment; it was an impulse pure, though unacknowledged friendship; it was proof of his own warm and amiable heart, which she could not contemplate without emotions so compounded with pleasure and pain, that she knew not which prevailed.

Related Characters: Anne Elliot, Captain Frederick Wentworth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Captain Wentworth is passing by Anne in a carriage, and he generously offers to give Anne a lift, recognizing that Anne looks tired from walking. Anne is flattered by Wentworth's offer: she interprets it to mean that Wentworth still has some feelings for her, even if he hides them beneath a facade of coldness and sternness. Austen doesn't tell us if Anne is right or wrong (on the surface of things, it seems that Wentworth just does the right thing; just because he offers Anne a ride doesn't mean that he's still in love with her). Wentworth's behavior in this passage is ambiguous, then, suggesting that he may or may not still love Anne; as the novel goes on, Austen throws out more and more overt hints of about his real feelings, creating a suspenseful mood.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ It was evident that the gentleman admired her exceedingly. Captain Wentworth looked round at her instantly in a way which shewed his noticing of it. He gave her a momentary glance,—a glance of brightness, which seemed to say, "That man is struck with you,—and even I, at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again."

Related Characters: Anne Elliot, Mr. William Elliot, Captain Frederick Wentworth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Anne lays eyes on the handsome William Elliot, her potential suitor. Yet because Captain Wentworth is also in the vicinity, he seems to give Anne a look that shows that he's still attracted to her.

The passage is curious because it suggests, very subtly, that Captain Wentworth's feelings for Anne are reignited *because* she now has another suitor; it's as if he's only interested in Anne when he can't have her. The famous French philosopher Rene Girard has a saying for such a dynamic: "there is always a third person in the room"--in other words, people are more attracted to one another whenever there's a competition for love. Wentworth seems to desire Anne in part because William Elliot also desires her. In such a way, Austen sets in motion the events of the second half of the book: Wentworth and Elliot compete for Anne's affections, forcing Anne to make a difficult choice.

❝ Anne wondered whether it ever occurred to him now, to question the justness of his own previous opinion as the universal felicity and advantage of firmness of character; and whether it might not strike him, that, like all other qualities of the mind, it should have its proportions and limits. She thought it could scarcely escape him to feel, that a persuadable temper might sometimes be as much in favour of happiness, as a very resolute character.

Related Characters: Anne Elliot, Captain Frederick Wentworth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Louisa Musgrove tries to jump from the high stairs into Captain Wentworth's arms; Wentworth naturally drops her, and Louisa injures her head. The incident seems to be a metaphor for the dangers of "hardness," the virtue that Captain Wentworth has previously extolled. It is Louisa's determined nature that impels her to jumps to Wentworth's arms, and it is the literal hardness of the floor that injures her.

As Anne sees it, the incident should prove to Wentworth that being determined and hard are often overrated virtues. Sometimes, it's better to be cautious and indecisive: indecisiveness can be a powerful survival mechanism. By the same logic, Anne seems to be hoping that Captain Wentworth will see why she broke off the engagement; why, sometimes, it's important for a woman to be cautious and indecisive because of her own best interests--in this society, women don't have as much freedom to be firm and decisive as men do.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ [Anne] might not wonder, but she must sigh that her father should feel no degradation in his change; should see nothing to regret in the duties and dignity of the resident land-holder; should find so much to be vain of in the littleness of a town; and she must sigh, and smile, and wonder too, as Elizabeth threw open the folding-doors and walked with exultation from one drawing-room to the other, boasting of their space, at the possibility of that woman, who had been mistress of Kellynch Hall, finding extent to be proud of between two walls, perhaps thirty feet asunder.

Related Characters: Anne Elliot, Elizabeth Elliot, Sir Walter

Elliot

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Anne joins her father and her sister, Elizabeth, in the town of Bath. Anne is secretly amused with her family members for being so impressed with such a tiny, ordinary town. Walter is proud of himself for being powerful enough to travel and reside in a town outside his own home at Kellynch Hall, and Elizabeth seems to feel a similar sense of pride: she praises their accommodations in Bath, even though they're pretty tiny (at least compared to their former home).

The passage is illuminating because it suggests that Anne's family members are more self-satisfied with the mere *fact* of owning real estate, being able to travel, and being aristocrats, than with the material conditions of their wealth and power. Walter's aristocracy is really title-only; he doesn't have a lot of money or political clout anymore, and yet the mere fact of being an aristocrat is enough to satisfy him. Anne, by contrast, can see (somewhat) through the theater of the aristocracy. The supposed power and glamor of the Baronetage doesn't really exist at all: Walter and Elizabeth are just getting off on their supposed prestige and superiority.

❝ [Mr. Elliot] was quite as good-looking as he had appeared at Lyme, his countenance improved by speaking, and his manners were so exactly what they ought to be, so polished, so easy, so particularly agreeable, that she could compare them in excellence to only one person's manners. . . . There could be no doubt of his being a sensible man. Ten minutes were enough to certify that. His tone, his expressions, his choice of subject, his knowing where to stop—it was all the operation of a sensible, discerning mind.

Related Characters: Anne Elliot, Mr. William Elliot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Anne gets to know Mr. Elliot a little better--but only a little. Mr. Elliot has come to Bath to visit Anne's family, and although Anne can't decide why he would do such a thing, Anne's family seems sure that he's going to try to marry Anne. Mr. Elliot seems like an excellent suitor for Anne; he's wealthy, successful, and handsome, as well as polite and courteous in tone.

Anne bases her assessment of Elliot's character on a ten-minute interaction with him, however, suggesting that her assessment might not be very accurate at all. Clearly, she's so dazzled by the appearance of properness and likability that she takes Mr. Elliot for granted without investigating any further. Anne seems so desperate for romance that she's willing to marry the first halfway-decent man who comes along, even if she doesn't know him well yet. Anne has made the mistake of being too cautious before, but now she seems to be veering too far in the other direction, throwing all caution to the wind.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ My idea of good company, Mr Elliot, is the company of clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversation; that is what I call good company.

Related Characters: Anne Elliot (speaker), Mr. William Elliot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mr. Elliot and Anne are getting to know each other better, though Anne still seems to think that Mr. Elliot might be more interested in her sister, Elizabeth. Mr. Elliot asks Anne how she defines good company, and to his surprise Anne disagrees with statements he's made before, claiming that "good company" consists of people who talk about intelligent subjects, rather than blabbing about the importance of social rank and genealogy. Anne, pretty clearly, is directing her criticism at people like her father, who talk about aristocracy and nothing else. Mr. Elliot seems to believe that aristocracy *is* an important subject, but he also seems to respect Anne for expressing her own opinion instead of blindly agreeing with him.

At this point in the text, Mr. Elliot and Anne seem to have a good relationship; though Elliot is old-fashioned and pretentious in many ways, he at least allows Anne to mature as a thinker, expressing her own ideas and opinions. One reason that Anne seems like a surprisingly modern

protagonist is that she distrusts the cult of the aristocracy; like most modern readers (presumably), she doesn't place a lot of stock in one's ancestry--it's more important to be talented, pleasant, or interesting than it is to have the right parents.

❝ Good company requires only birth, education and manners, and with regard to education is not very nice. Birth and good manners are essential; but a little learning is by no means a dangerous thing in good company, on the contrary, it will do very well. . . . Will it not be wiser to accept the society of these good ladies in Laura-place, and enjoy all the advantages of the connexion as far as possible? You may depend upon it, that they will move in the first set in Bath this winter, and as rank is rank, your being known to be related to them will have its use in fixing your family (our family let me say) in that degree of consideration which we must all wish for.

Related Characters: Mr. William Elliot (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

In this important passage, Mr. Elliot gives us a glimpse of his real intentions. Mr. Elliot has been arguing playfully with Anne about the importance of education and intelligence in "good company." Where Anne insists that the only qualifications for good company are intelligence and knowledge, Mr. Elliot insists that good company requires pedigree and "birth"--in other words, the best company is always aristocratic (a stimulating conversation with a group of commoners wouldn't really be good company by Elliot's definition). Elliot seems to admit that intelligence is worth *something*, but it's also clear that he places more stock in birth, meaning that he's not so different from Anne's father, Sir Walter. Elliot's investment in the aristocracy is clear, insofar as he steers the conversation toward social climbing. Elliot suggests that Anne's family association with the aristocracy (and, assuming Mr. Elliot marries into Anne's family, *his* association) will help them rise in society and gain the proper "degree of consideration."

In retrospect, it's possible to see that Mr. Elliot is actually obsessed with title: he wants to marry Anne (or Elizabeth) because he wants a title for himself. He's only pretending to care about intelligence and good conversation because he wants to impress Anne and con her into accepting his marriage proposal.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ A submissive spirit might be patient, a strong understanding would supply resolution, but here was something more; here was that elasticity of mind, that disposition to be comforted, that power of turning readily from evil to good, and of finding employment which carried her out of herself, which was from Nature alone. It was the choicest gift of Heaven; and Anne viewed her friend as one of those instances in which, by a merciful appointment, it seems designed to counterbalance almost every other want.

Related Characters: Mrs. Smith, Anne Elliot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we're introduced to Anne's old friend Mrs. Smith. Mrs. Smith has had a tough life: she lost her husband, and also developed a crippling illness that's left her without control of her lower body. And yet Mrs. Smith doesn't allow her life's tragedies to make her sad: she seems incredibly cheery and optimistic at all times--it's as if the universe's woes have changed her external condition, but not the nature of her soul.

Mrs. Smith is an important character because she seems to stand outside the rules of the novel--the rules of marriage, courtship, money, aristocracy, etc. She's "lost," by most definitions--she has no money, no husband, no mobility (literally), etc.--and yet she seems not to care. Because she doesn't let the stakes of marriage and courtship affect her happiness, she seems utterly free--free in a way that the younger, more eligible Anne is not, paradoxically. Mrs. Smith is, one could say, the only character without a personal stake in the events of the plot: she has nothing riding on Anne's engagement except her own friendship with Anne. Therefore, she's a trustworthy character and good advice-giver.

❝ Mr. Elliot was rational, discreet, polished—but he was not open. There was never any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation or delight, at the evil or good of others. This, to Anne, was a decided imperfection. Her early impressions were incurable . . . She felt that she could so much more depend upon the sincerity of those who sometimes looked or said a careless or a hasty thing, than of those whose presence of mind never varied, whose tongue never slipped. Mr. Elliot was too generally agreeable.

Related Characters: Anne Elliot, Mr. William Elliot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118-119

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we learn that Mr. Elliot really is trying to marry Anne, not her sister, Elizabeth. Mr. Elliot is a charming, highly agreeable man, but there's something untrustworthy about him: he's so clean that he has to be dirty. Previously, Anne has been charmed by Mr. Elliot's easy manner and witty observations, but now she's beginning to wonder if he might be hiding something from her and her family. It's as if Mr. Elliot wears a mask of cheerfulness and respectability, beneath which one would find his true feelings (or actions).

Previously, Anne thought of Mr. Elliot as charming and likable--but what has changed in Anne's assessment of Mr. Elliot? In no small part, Anne is having second thoughts about Mr. Elliot because she's just seen her old friend Mrs. Smith. Interacting with Mrs. Smith, who stands outside the great "game" of courtship, politeness, and properness, helps Anne see how fake and insincere the game really is; as a result, she has an easier time seeing through Mr. Elliot's suave behavior.

Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ We [women] certainly do not forget you, so soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions. . . . All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone.

Related Characters: Anne Elliot (speaker), Captain and Mrs. Harville

Related Themes:

Page Number: 173-175

Explanation and Analysis

In this illuminating passage, Anne has a playful argument with Captain Harville about whether men or women are more constant and devoted in their love for other people. Anne argues that woman are more devoted, because they have to reside at home, and have nothing to nourish their spirits except for their feelings for the people they care about. Men, on the other hand, have jobs and careers to distract them from their true feelings; therefore, they can get distracted by other things, and forget about their loved ones.

The debate that Anne and Captan Harville have is, of course, highly relevant to the plot of the novel and to Austen's social criticism of gender inequality. Anne is remembering her love for Captain Wentworth, and suggests that Wentworth has found it easier to forget about Anne than vice versa, since he's had a long and fulfilling career as a Navy man. In such a way, Anne subtly makes herself the real victim of the broken engagement with Wentworth. Over the course of the novel, Anne has become a lively and witty young woman, discovering the courage to disagree with her male companions, asserting her agency in doing so--even if she still has little real social power or independence as an unmarried woman.

❝ I will not allow it to be more man's nature than woman's to be inconstant and forget those they do love, or have loved. I believe the reverse. I believe in a true analogy between our bodily frames and our mental; and that as our bodies are the strongest, so are our feelings; capable of being most rough usage, and riding out the heaviest weather.

Related Characters: Captain and Mrs. Harville (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Captain Harville disagrees with Anne about whether men or women are the most devoted in their love for other people. Where Anne insists that men are inferior to women as lovers, Harville that because men have stronger bodies than women, they must also have stronger emotions and willpower than women.

It's important to notice that Harville's argument is simply worse than Anne's--more poorly constructed, not as well thought-out, and more bullying in its presentation. In such a way, Austen subtly forces the debate toward Anne's position: reading the passage, the reader easily concludes that Anne is right: women (at the time, at least) really are

better and more devoted lovers, since they don't have professions and careers to distract them. Nevertheless, Harville has a point, at least in this individual situation: his observations have obvious relevance to Captain Wentworth's feelings for Anne. Over the years, it's implied, Captain Wentworth has actually continued to love Anne, even if he sometimes hides his feelings beneath a mask of formality and curtness.

> There [Anne and Captain Wentowrth] returned again into the past, more exquisitely happy, perhaps, in their re-union, than when it had been first projected; more tender, more tried, more fixed in a knowledge of each other's character, truth, and attachment; more equal to act, more justified in acting.

Related Characters: Captain Frederick Wentworth, Anne Elliot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 179

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Wentworth affirms his love for Anne; he admits that he's loved her all along, even after she broke off their engagement. Wentworth and Anne, having acknowledged that they love each other, find themselves transported to the past; they rediscover their former feelings for each other. Moreover, Austen suggests that Anne and Wentworth are actually *more* in love now than they were years before.

Austen's purpose in the rest of Chapter 23, as we'll see, is largely to show that Anne and Wentworth were right to wait before getting married: breaking off the engagement the first time around wasn't a mistake, just as it isn't a mistake for them to get married now. It's as if Anne and Wentworth's feelings for one another have matured over the years, resulting in a love that's stronger for having already withstood the test of time. Unlike most marriages in Austen's lifetime, Anne and Wentworth's marriage is already rooted in genuine, powerful love: the fact that Anne and Wentworth have continued to love each other over so many years virtually proves that they'll continue to love each other for the rest of their lives.

> If I was wrong in yielding to persuasion once, remember that it was persuasion exerted on the side of safety, not of risk. When I yielded, I thought it was to duty; but no duty could be called in aid here. In marrying a man indifferent to me, all risk would have been incurred, and all duty violated.

Related Characters: Anne Elliot (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Anne and Wentworth work out some of their feelings for each other. Anne tries to explain why she turned Wentworth down so many years ago: others persuaded her to do so for practical reasons. Yet Anne no longer seems not to regret her decision altogether: on the contrary, she believes that duty and prudence really are important in achieving happiness. Notice the way that she alludes to the possibility of marrying Mr. Elliot: such a decision would have been a bad one, she explains, because it would have violated her duty to her family (demonstrating that Anne continues to place a lot of stock in the concept of duty itself). Asserting one's will blindly isn't always the best course of action, essentially--often it's necessary to take other, more complicated factors into consideration when making decisions.

> I was right in submitting to her, and that if I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience. I have now, as far as such a sentiment is allowable in human nature, nothing to reproach myself with; and if I mistake not, a strong sense of duty is no bad part of a woman's portion.

Related Characters: Anne Elliot (speaker), Lady Russell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

Anne continues to talk with Captain Wentworth about her decision to beak off their engagement years ago. While Anne has gone through a lot of sadness in the years following her decision, she now seems not to regret her decision anymore; she took the advice of a good mentor, Lady Russell, and she's now happy she did.

The point of the passage seems to be that Anne was right to wait so many years for Wentworth, and to allow herself to be persuaded by her trusted friends. The years between her first and second engagements have strengthened Anne's character and strengthened her love for Wentworth, and the same is true of Wentworth. The moral, one could say, is that being completely headstrong and impulsive is just as bad as being completely obedient to other people; in Anne's character, we see the compromise between duty and freedom, persuasion and independence--Anne is a mature young woman, but her independence doesn't compel her to ignore others' advice; she marries Wentworth now because it's the practical *and* the romantic thing to do.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

The novel introduces us to the vain and self-absorbed Sir Walter, whose favorite pastime is to pore over the **Baronetage**, a book of important English families that includes his own lineage. His own wife bore him three daughters before passing away: Elizabeth, Anne, and Mary respectively.

The importance of social class is introduced immediately in Sir Walter's vain pastime of reading the Baronetage. His social importance is defined in part by blood, as with the Elliot aristocratic lineage, but also by estate: Kellynch Hall.

The late Lady Elliot was an excellent and sensible woman whose virtues softened her husband's failings. Although there are hints that her marriage, stemming from youthful infatuation, has not been the happiest, she has made the best of her situation and faithfully devoted herself to her family and friends during her lifetime.

Austen explores what makes a good marriage; Lady Elliot, while marrying well to rank and land, has not married her match in virtue, intelligence, or temperament, leaving the advantages of character improvement through marriage to Sir Walter.

After Lady Elliot's passing, her intimate friend and advisor Lady Russell helped Sir Walter to raise his daughters. Elizabeth is beautiful and vain, her father's favorite; Anne has her mother's elegance of mind and sweetness of character, appreciated by Lady Russell, though not by Sir Walter nor Elizabeth. Mary has gained importance by being married.

The superficial Sir Walter and Elizabeth fail to recognize Anne's virtues; they can only understand the graces of beauty, blood, and rank. Lady Russell, while sharing similar values, also recognizes that qualities of mind and character characterize real refinement.

Sir Walter's hopes for enhancing his family's importance through a suitable marriage rest on Elizabeth, as he deems Anne's beauty to have faded and Mary's marriage to have "given all the honour, and received none." Several years ago, he and Elizabeth harbored hopes of her marriage to Mr. William Elliot, the heir presumptive; however, Mr. Elliot scorned the inheritance of the baronetcy and chose independence by marrying a wealthy woman of lower birth. Sir Walter and Elizabeth were deeply offended and all communication has since broken off.

Marriage is a vehicle for social mobility and financial independence. Mary's marriage is suitable, but Sir Walter hopes that Elizabeth's marriage will elevate the family with an even better connection. Mr. Elliot's actions reveal his value of money over blood: he marries to a woman of lower birth over the aristocratic Elizabeth as a speedy means of attaining financial independence.

Because of Sir Walter and Elizabeth's extravagant lifestyle, the Elliot family is now facing financial trouble. They are in great debt, but neither is willing to give up the luxuries they view as necessary to maintain their aristocratic lifestyle and the dignity it entitles them to. Mr. Shepherd, the family agent and lawyer, and Lady Russell are called on for their advice.

Sir Walter's vanity and irresponsibility demonstrate that wealth and blood do not necessarily come with sensibility. Fortunately for him, he has others like Anne, Lady Russell, and Mr. Shepherd to counsel him, and temper his sense of entitlement to extravagant expenses.

CHAPTER 2

Mr. Shepherd and Lady Russell draft plans for cutting back on expenditure. Lady Russell shares Sir Walter's aristocratic sensibilities but also possesses good sense and honesty, as she attempts to persuade him to a more modest budget. Anne feels their spending should be cut even further; she is less concerned with aristocratic displays of importance than the honest need to pay back their creditors.

In Sir Walter and Anne, we observe competing notions of what constitutes real dignity: both possess a strong sense of family honor, but Sir Walter sees it as inseparable from the luxurious trappings of aristocracy, while Anne sees integrity and responsibility as critical to real dignity.

Sir Walter heatedly rejects the "disgraceful" propositions to cut back on his spending, exclaiming that he would prefer to leave **Kellynch Hall** altogether before remaining in it without his necessary dignities. Mr. Shepherd seizes upon this suggestion as a good strategy for reducing the costly expenses related to living in the estate. It is eventually decided that the Elliots will move to Bath and find a worthy tenant for Kellynch to appease Sir Walter's pride.

English aristocracy was associated with blood, wealth, and land, but it was also meant to be supported by responsible stewardship and generosity with regard to the community. Sir Walter clings to the association of blood and land, but his self-important irresponsibility reveals the fragility of the assumptions underlying the aristocracy.

Lady Russell heartily approves this relocation. Although Anne dislikes Bath, Lady Russell feels that it will be good for the family financially. She is also wary of the developing friendship between Elizabeth and Mrs. Clay, the widowed daughter of Mr. Shepherd. She feels Mrs. Clay is not Elizabeth's equal and is dangerously flattering to Sir Walter.

Lady Russell's motives reveal both a genuine concern for the Elliot family and her own aristocratic prejudices in what she believes to be best for them. While Mrs. Clay is unpleasantly obsequious, it is clear that her main crime in Lady Russell's eyes is her low birth and presumption in wheedling her way into Elizabeth and Sir Walter's affections.

CHAPTER 3

Mr. Shepherd recommends that Sir Walter consider a man from the **Navy** for his tenant, as the end of war will be returning many to England. Sir Walter and Mrs. Clay proudly exclaim over what an honor it would be for a tenant to live in **Kellynch** Hall. Sir Walter finds the Navy offensive because it "brings persons of obscure birth into undue distinction" and it weathers a man's good looks. Mrs. Clay flatters Sir Walter by suggesting that every profession wears on a man's looks except that of the established landowner.

The Navy is another emerging vehicle for social mobility and offers an alternative means of attaining rank and wealth in contrast to either birth or marriage: in the Navy men of low birth may earn honor and fortune through hard work and service for their nation at sea. For this reason, Sir Walter regards the Navy with wariness; it threatens the established order of the aristocracy.

Mr. Shepherd reports that the wealthy Admiral Croft of Somersetshire is looking to settle down in the neighborhood, and he recommends him as a very respectable and responsible tenant. He assures Sir Walter of Admiral Croft's desirable qualities: he is healthy looking, from a gentleman's family, and married without children. His wife is sure to look after the estate well. He also mentions that Admiral Croft's wife is the sister of Mr. Wentworth, a curate at Monkford in the area. Sir Walter is unimpressed with this connection, but his vanity and sense are both satisfied by Admiral Croft's eligibility: his tenant is of good status, but not *too* superior. Mr. Shepherd is authorized to arrange the deal, and Elizabeth is pleased at the prospect of Bath. Anne departs with the anticipation that she may soon see her first love.

In addition to the social advantages of the Navy, there is considerable suggestion as to its virtues as a more meritocratic vehicle of change. Naval officers are considered hard-working, brave, and responsible; Mr. Shepherd suggests as much in recommending Admiral Croft not only for his social suitability but stewardship qualifications. There is also some suggestion that the presence of a woman will ensure that the domestic sphere is well looked after. Sir Walter again reveals his snobbery in considering Admiral Croft's rank of first importance.

CHAPTER 4

Captain Frederick Wentworth, Mr. Wentworth's brother, is the subject of Anne's anticipation; he lived in Monkford in 1806, seven years earlier when he and Anne were in their early twenties, where he and Anne fell in love. He was a fine young man, intelligent and spirited; however, he has neither wealth nor good social connections to render him Anne's social equal.

Anne and Captain Wentworth are a good match in terms of their looks, personalities, and characters; they both possess kind hearts and strong understanding, with Wentworth's confidence complementing Anne's sensibility.

Anne and Captain Wentworth planned to marry, but Sir Walter and Lady Russell considered the alliance very degrading and Captain Wentworth reckless. Lady Russell strongly opposed the match, believing it her duty to protect Anne from throwing herself away in such an unequal match. She eventually persuaded the young and gentle Anne to call off their engagement as imprudent. Heartbroken, Anne nonetheless consoled herself that she was acting in both of their best interests. However, Captain Wentworth believes himself ill-used by Anne and leaves the country. Anne's grief at the broken engagement fades away her youthful spirit and beauty.

However, they are an unsuitable match for each other in terms of worldly and practical considerations of financial dependency, social rank, and blood (lineage). However unromantic, Austen ultimately affirms the significance of these barriers and the rightness of taking them into consideration: Anne's decision to submit to Lady's Russell's advice may be interpreted as the affirmation of duty, honor, and humility over passion—though it is interpreted as weakness of will by young Captain Wentworth.

Seven years later, Anne has had no second attachment (although Charles Musgrove proposed to her before marrying her sister Mary), change of place, nor enlargement of society to distract her, although time has eased her suffering. Although she does not blame Lady Russell for her advice, she regrets her decision; time has justified Captain Wentworth's hopes for the future, as he has by now attained a handsome future and rank in the **navy**. Having been prudent in her youth, she has learned romance with maturity. Now that Captain Wentworth's sister, Mrs. Croft, will reside in **Kellynch** Hall, these memories resurface.

As a woman, Anne's opportunities for social mobility, love, and life are much more limited than Captain Wentworth's. Even though her aristocratic position offers her certain security and pleasures, she cannot seek fulfillment and distraction from heartbreak through career and travel as Captain Wentworth does. The addition of eight years also disproportionately reduces her marital prospects, as she nears the age of spinsterhood.

CHAPTER 5

Admiral and Mrs. Croft visit **Kellynch** to the great satisfaction of all parties. Sir Walter approves of the Admiral's good humor and manners, and declares him to be handsomest sailor he has met. The deal is settled.

Sir Walter displays a rather amusing regard for good looks, which are not particularly related to, or even consistent with, his values of aristocracy.

Mary complains that she is feeling unwell and Anne must stay with her at Uppercross Cottage, instead of heading straight to Bath with Sir Walter and Elizabeth. Anne is pleased with the opportunity to be useful and stay in the country.

As we learn more about Anne's flawed family, her virtues become increasingly remarkable; they also explain the great value of Lady Russell in her life as a better friend and advisor than either her sisters or father.

Lady Russell is displeased that Mrs. Clay plans to travel to Bath with Sir Walter and Elizabeth; Anne also worries that Mrs. Clay's persistent flattery may induce Sir Walter to take her as his wife. She warns Elizabeth of the danger, but Elizabeth rejects the notion as ridiculous and offensive. She believes her friend would not presume to make such an unequal match, and that she is not attractive enough to interest their father.

Anne and Lady Russell are more astute than Sir Walter and Elizabeth, whose self-importance and self-assurance allow them only to understand what they want to see. Despite the fact that Mrs. Clay is Elizabeth's close friend, Elizabeth is less observant than Anne about the true nature of Mrs. Clay's flattery.

When Anne visits Mary, she finds her in a sour mood. Mary is prone to self-pity, complaining that she is neglected and ill-used by her two unruly sons and husband who is out shooting. Anne patiently perseveres in cheering her sister, and the two take a walk to the Great House, where the Musgroves (Charles's parents and sisters) live.

Although Mary is less vain and silly than Sir Walter and Elizabeth, she is still a far cry from Anne's sensibility. Anne's patience, gentleness, and sensitivity are particularly evident in her interactions with her family, which almost serve as a foil to her virtues.

The Musgroves are a pleasant family; Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove are friendly and hospitable, neither educated nor elegant. Their children are more modern: Henrietta and Louisa are nineteen and twenty, newly returned from school at Exeter, and several young children. Anne regards their family as some of the happiest people she knows for their good-humored mutual affection.

The Musgroves present a vision of family life and hospitality very different from the silly and vain Elliots. They are cheerful, carefree, and warm; they have a happy and loving family life, although they lack the cultural refinements and education that Anne herself values.

CHAPTER 6

Anne is struck again by how dramatically the concerns of the Musgroves differ from the Elliots; the former have minimal interest in the affairs of aristocracy and **Kellynch**, which so preoccupy her father and Elizabeth. It is with humbling recognition that Anne reflects on her good fortune of having a truly sympathetic and balanced friend in Lady Russell. Instead, the Musgroves are absorbed with hunting, house-keeping, and music.

The Musgroves also present another tier of English social class; they are wealthy and landed, but not titled. As such, their concerns differ considerably from the self-absorbed Elliots: they care little for the aristocracy, and they are interested mainly in sports, dress, and social parties—local affairs and house-keeping.

Charles is civil and agreeable, more sensible and even-tempered than Mary. While a better woman might have improved his habits and character, he wastes his time on sport. He and Mary are happy enough as a couple, as he manages Mary's moods well.

Charles and Mary are happy enough as a couple, but they lack the compatibility or complementarity of a real match of minds and hearts. As in Sir Walter's marriage, Mary—though not Charles—benefits from her spouse's superior temperament.


Anne is well-liked by the Musgroves. The children respect her more than their mother, and all parties confide and complain to her. She often finds herself in the uncomfortable situation of mediator, as each party ask her to persuade the others to make changes. Charles wants Mary to stop imagining herself ill; Mary wants Charles to take her complaints seriously; and Mrs. Musgrove wants Mary to manage her household and children better. Anne listens patiently, attempting to soften their grievances, encourage good will, and give her sister beneficial hints.

Although Anne is unappreciated and overlooked in her own family, she is admired and liked by the Musgroves—even more than her own sister who has married into the family. They all recognize her capability, kindness, and good sense, qualities that make her a good mediator, confidante, and advisor.


The first weeks of Anne's visit pass pleasantly in neighborhood visits and dinner parties, as the Musgroves are very popular. But Anne soon feels sad at the prospect of strangers moving into **Kellynch Hall**. The Crofts return Charles and Mary's visit, giving Anne the opportunity to meet them. Mrs. Croft has an amiable and easy manner. To her excitement and anxiety, Anne learns that Captain Wentworth will soon be visiting.

Whether because of her temperament, past sorrows, or mature years, Anne experiences life in a more seriously reflective and introversive manner than most of the other characters; even in the midst of the cheerful Musgroves, she is mindful of the reality that she has lost her home. However, she is still able to fairly appreciate the Crofts' worth.

Mrs. Musgrove is unsettled by the mention of Captain Wentworth. Her son Dick, a troublesome and stupid youth, was sent to work in the **Navy** and served under Captain Wentworth. She recalls that Dick spoke highly of Captain Wentworth, who treated him very well. Although Dick was unmanageable, his death at sea grieved his mother and she resolves to welcome Captain Wentworth warmly into the neighborhood in his memory.

We learn about Captain Wentworth first from the memories and reports of others, through which Austen sets the stage for his entry into the novel. Mrs. Musgrove's account of his treatment to her delinquent son hint at his kindness and compassion as well as his capability and skill as an officer.

CHAPTER 7

Captain Wentworth arrives to stay with his sister, Mrs. Croft, at **Kellynch Hall**. Mr. Musgrove returns from calling on Captain Wentworth with warm praise; he has invited him to dinner at the Great House at Uppercross.

Positive reports and praise continue to trickle in alongside Anne's memories of Captain Wentworth, building anticipation for his arrival.

Anne feels very anxious about seeing Captain Wentworth again after so many years. However, the day he visits their reunion is delayed; as Mary and Anne head over to meet him at the Great House, Mary's little boy dislocates his collar-bone. The apothecary declares that the injury is not critical. The same day Henrietta and Louisa visit with reports of how much more charming, handsome, and agreeable Captain Wentworth is than any other male they know. He is to dine with them the next day.

The suspense continues to build, as Anne's reunion with Captain Wentworth is further delayed. The sisters bring back glowing praise for Captain Wentworth, and everything suggests that he is in a much better position all around than he was eight years ago. Meanwhile, Anne's life revolves around caring for her negligent and silly family members.

The following day, the child appears to be recovering well. Charles decides he will dine at the Great House, but Mary is displeased that she will have to stay at home to care for the boy and miss out on meeting Captain Wentworth. Anne offers to stay at home with the boy herself, and Mary delightedly departs.

Mary's self-absorption and disregard for her children is particularly contrasted with Anne's selfless helpfulness. Mary exhibits obliviousness to Anne's desires similar to that way that Sir Walter and Elizabeth do.

Anne wonders about Captain Wentworth's feelings are for her after all these years, believing him to be either unwilling or indifferent. Charles and Mary return with warm reports of Captain Wentworth, whom it appears everyone loves.

Anne possesses a remarkable self-awareness that extends to her consideration of the feelings of others. Her humility and sensibility prevent her from assuming Captain Wentworth's constancy in love equal to hers.

Captain Wentworth calls on Mary the following morning, before leaving to hunt with Charles. He briefly acknowledges Anne's presence and is gone. Later, she learns from Mary that he told Henrietta he thought Anne was "so altered he should not have known [her] again." Anne feels hurt, but soberly resolves to compose herself. She recognizes that time has taken her beauty and youth, while it has only enhanced Captain Wentworth's personal advantages.

Captain Wentworth displays an initial coldness to Anne that suggests the difference that eight years have made in lowering Anne's prospects and raising his own. The unequal impact that time has in influencing male and female marital prospects is a symptom of the gender inequality present in Austen's England.

Captain Wentworth, for his part, has not forgiven Anne; he was deeply attached to her, and believed her actions in breaking the engagement to display feeble character. Confident and rich, he has now resolved to marry, and is eager to fall in love with "any pleasing young woman who came his way" with the unspoken exception of Anne Elliot.

Captain Wentworth's behavior towards Anne reflects his bitterness and ungenerous evaluation of her past actions. Anne, for her part, continues to interpret his actions with compassion and admiration.

CHAPTER 8

Captain Wentworth and Anne see each other frequently at dinners and other meetings, as they are now in the same social circle. Anne sadly reflects on the great change that has passed in the nature of their relationship; they who were once so open, similar, and united in feelings with each other, now barely speak to each other except when courtesy requires! They were happier than all the couples, except perhaps Admiral and Mrs. Croft, but now they are perpetually estranged.

Anne reflects on the real happiness that could have been hers, as she and Captain Wentworth were perfectly suited in temperament and sentiment. The suggestion that Admiral and Mrs. Croft are the only other model match indicates that Austen considers true matches to consist of equal understanding and character and practicality.

Henrietta and Louisa eagerly question Captain Wentworth about the **Navy**. Mrs. Musgrove grieves at this reminder of her son, and Captain Wentworth sits by her side to comfort her. He is kind and sensitive, and he demonstrates a warm sense of humor and confident convictions over dinner. He believes that women should not board a ship, because they will be uncomfortable. Mrs. Croft counters that women are not so delicate, and that she has been very comfortable on ships with her husband. The Crofts travel everywhere together, and tease Captain Wentworth that he will see the matter differently once married.

Although Mrs. Musgrove's grief is depicted as rather melodramatic, Captain Wentworth's sympathetic engagement with her further supports Anne's opinion of his merits. Austen pits his chivalric notion of gender differences against the outspoken Mrs. Croft's insistence that women are perfectly capable of weathering naval conditions and belong by their man's side.

The evening ends with dancing and music. Anne plays at the piano, her eyes occasionally tearing with emotion. Everyone is having a delightful time, and Captain Wentworth is in the highest of spirits. He is the center of attention, and all the young ladies appear in love with him. His cold politeness and hurts Anne more than anything.

While Captain Wentworth's intentions may be innocent, his behavior demonstrates insensitivity to the feelings of his admirers—most notably, Anne, who still harbors deep feelings for him.

CHAPTER 9

Captain Wentworth pays regular visits to the Musgroves at Uppercross. It is clear he is a favorite of the daughters, and the family speculates which one he will choose. Charles Hayter, a cousin and Henrietta's suitor, is dismayed to find upon returning from his trip that her affections appear to have shifted towards Captain Wentworth.

As a naval officer with a fortune, rank, and charms, Captain Wentworth has become a very eligible and desirable bachelor. The world of women has opened to him, even as the number of suitors seems to have dwindled for Anne with time.

Charles Hayter is the eldest of the cousins, amiable and pleasing. Mrs. Hayter, his mother, is Mrs. Musgrove's sister. Marriage has elevated Mrs. Musgrove, while the Hayters are in an "inferior, retired and unpolished way of living." Nonetheless, the two families are on excellent terms without pride or envy, and their parents have no objection to a match between Charles and Henrietta so long as it makes her happy. Mary, however, wants to see Henrietta and Captain Wentworth paired off, as she considers the Hayters a degrading alliance.

The difference in social importance between the sisters Mrs. Hayter and Mrs. Musgrove reveals the extent to which marriage can elevate or degrade women. But the good relationship between the Hayters and Musgroves also illustrates that class need not always be an obstacle for young lovers when they have supportive parents who care primarily about their children's happiness.

One morning, Captain Wentworth inadvertently finds himself alone with Anne and the little invalid child while looking for Henrietta and Louisa. The two are unsettled; the situation is made more uncomfortable when Charles Hayter enters the room. One of the younger boys, Walter, comes into the room and begins playing with his aunt, clinging on her back despite her protests and Charles Hayter's commands to cease. Captain Wentworth comes to her rescue, plucking the boy off her; Anne is so startled and agitated by this kindness that she cannot articulate her thanks. She later feels ashamed of her nervousness.

This incident displays Captain Wentworth's good qualities and hints at the emergence of his continuing regard for Anne; despite his feelings of ill-usage and bitterness, he does not like to see her hurt and quickly comes to her aid. He is a man of action and compassion, quicker and more decisive in saving her than Charles Hayter. He has no desire for show or thanks, but acts out of the impulse of his own heart.

CHAPTER 10

After further observation, Anne believes that Captain Wentworth is in love with neither Henrietta nor Louisa. They are more infatuated with him; though Anne suspects Henrietta still divided in her affections. Charles Hayter seems slighted and eventually stops visiting. Captain Wentworth appears entirely oblivious as to the pain he has inflicted, and Anne is satisfied to believe that his only fault is in accepting the attentions of two young women at once.

Quiet and unobtrusive, Anne is nonetheless extremely observant and perceptive. She is also able to discern both qualities in others, and she infers the true state of Captain Wentworth's heart towards Henrietta and Louisa. However, Anne's humility and generosity prevent her from observing his enduring attachment and unfairness to herself.

One morning, the sisters decide to go for a long walk. Mary insists on joining them, though her presence is clearly unwelcome; Anne joins as well with the intention of tempering the situation. They run into Charles Musgrove and Captain Wentworth and set out together. Captain Wentworth and Louisa flirt gaily; at one point, she exclaims that she would never allow anything to separate her from the man she loved, to his enthusiastic agreement for that viewpoint. Despite her intention to simply enjoy the beautiful weather and exercise, Anne cannot help being distracted by their exchange.

We observe the degree to which Captain Wentworth's values have been shaped by his experiences with Anne and prejudiced against flexibility of mind. He prizes passion, conviction, and loyalty in a woman because he believes Anne allowed herself to be persuaded against him eight years earlier , and he seems to believe that these "active" behaviors are associated with the kind of enthusiastic and dramatic claims of Louisa.

The party finds themselves at Winthrop, the home of the Hayters. Mary disgustedly suggests they turn back at the prospect of encountering their lowly connections. Louisa and Charles protest, though, and it is decided that he and Henrietta will visit the Hayters. The others wait and wander in the woods. Louisa and Captain Wentworth separate from the group. Mary cannot be satisfied with sitting still, as she is convinced that Louisa has found a better spot; Anne takes the opportunity to rest behind a shrub.

Mary displays contempt for her socially inferior relations before which Henrietta's desire to see Charles Hayter appears to waver. It is only after Louisa and Charles encourage and support Henrietta's initial inclination that she finds the courage to visit the Hayters; however, her hesitation stems from less worthy motives than Anne's submission to Lady Russell.

Anne overhears Louisa telling Captain Wentworth that she encouraged Henrietta to visit Charles Hayter, though Henrietta would have turned back after Mary's interference. The two discuss the evils of "yielding and indecisive" characters and extol the virtue of firm resolution; Captain Wentworth playfully compares this quality to a hazelnut plucked from a tree, which is not trodden underfoot like others. He declares that his greatest wish for those he is interested in should be that they be firm.

Captain Wentworth extols firmness of resolve as the pinnacle of virtues; he believes that real happiness comes from unwavering conviction, like a hazelnut upon which no impressions have been made. He equates firmness of principle to inflexibility of mind, not recognizing that the latter may lead to disastrous consequences and folly.

As they walk away, Louisa tells Captain Wentworth that she wishes her brother had married Anne instead of the snobbish Mary. He inquires interestedly in the affair, learning that Anne refused Charles, which his parents attributed to the influence of Lady Russell. When the group reassembles, Henrietta has brought Charles Hayter with her.

The conversation between Louisa and Captain Wentworth is painful and frustrating for Anne, as it reveals to her a number of negative impressions and misinterpretations of her past actions by Wentworth—as well as how those misunderstandings have shaped her beloved.

On their way back, they run into Admiral and Mrs. Croft in their carriage. Captain Wentworth arranges for them to give Anne a lift, displaying a touching and gallant sensitivity to her fatigue. She receives it as the remainder of former sentiment, and proof of his warm and amiable heart.

Again, Captain Wentworth's actions display his chivalric sensitivity to Anne's distress as well as hinting at a lingering attachment to her in spite of the many years and their changed circumstances.

CHAPTER 11

Just as Anne anticipates visiting Lady Russell, Captain Wentworth returns from a visit with friends at Lyme with warm reports of the seaside town. Anne, Charles, Mary, Henrietta, Louisa, and Captain Wentworth plan a short vacation to the town. They meet Captain and Mrs. Harville, who are Captain Wentworth's friends from the **Navy**. They are generous and welcoming people.

Austen displays a generous regard for the Navy in her depiction of officers, who generally and more consistently display virtue and positive character than perhaps any other class of characters—whether the aristocracy, landed gentry, or lower ranking widows.

Captain Benwick, a former lieutenant, is also staying with them; his excellent character and grief over the recent death of his fiancée, Mrs. Harville's sister, excites the others' sympathy. Although melancholy and reserved at first, he and Anne form a friendship over poetry. Anne recommends prose reading and encourages him to fortitude; she reflects on the irony of teaching patience and resignation to a grieving lover, when she feels they are lessons she also requires.

Captain Benwick is a romantically tragic figure who appears mired in mourning, yet Austen suggests that the showiest grief is not necessarily the most constant in his character. Anne is able to lift his spirits and inspire hope of new romance in a fairly short time, which testifies to how compelling and compassionate she can be.

CHAPTER 12

The next day, Anne and Henrietta go for an early morning walk. They amiably discuss the local affairs and the health benefits of the seaside. They run into Captain Wentworth and Louisa, who are also taking a stroll. As they head back for breakfast, they pass a gentleman who gives Anne a clearly admiring look; Captain Wentworth notices and seems struck himself with how the fine wind has animated her complexion.

For the first time, the reader and Captain Wentworth see Anne anew, not as the woman who has lost her bloom but a pretty woman; struck by the stranger's admiration, he observes something of his first love in Anne at Lyme.

At the inn, Anne discovers that the admiring gentleman is also staying at their inn. Captain Wentworth inquires as to his identity, and it turns out that he is none other than Mr. Elliot—their rich cousin and Sir Walter's heir, whose first wife has passed away. Mary laments missing the opportunity for an introduction, although Anne quietly reminds her that such a meeting could be awkward as their father has not been on good terms with Mr. Elliot for years.

The intrigue around the admiring stranger thickens, as his identity and blood relation become clear; the fact that he is Anne's cousin, her father's heir, wealthy, and newly single, renders him a remarkably eligible match by societal standards. Nonetheless, Anne is quicker than Mary to perceive the complexity of their family's relationship to Mr. Elliot.

The entire company goes for an afternoon stroll along the seaside. Captain Benwick converses with Anne; Captain Harville later praises her for her help in rejuvenating his widower friend. Louisa is determined to leap from a set of stairs into Captain Wentworth's arms. Despite his concern about the hardness of the pavement, she insists on doing so again; she does so a moment before he is ready and falls, knocking herself unconscious. Everyone is frantic; Anne alone remains calm and comforts the others, directs Captain Benwick for a doctor and Captain Wentworth to carry Louisa back.

Louisa's unwavering and headstrong personality—the very "firmness of will" that Captain Wentworth so extolled as the ultimate virtue—proves to have disastrous consequences. Her insistence on having her way demonstrates no underlying steadfastness to principle, but rather the stubborn folly of clinging to her first impulse. Anne's level-headed reaction poses a striking contrast of her composure and capability.

The Harvilles take Louisa into their home. The doctor informs them that she has had a severe head injury. It is decided that Louisa will stay with the Harvilles to recover under the care of Anne, and Captain Wentworth, Henrietta, and Mary will report the accident to the Musgroves. However, Mary objects that she is closer to Louisa than Anne and just as capable, and Anne reluctantly submits to switching places.

Everything that follows after Louisa's accident further highlights the contrast and complicates the consequences of Louisa's "firmness of will" and Anne's flexibility of mind in favor of duty. Anne's combination of constant compassion and adaptability enables her to respond quickly and confidently to the accident.

Captain Wentworth is deeply grieved and blames himself for giving way to Louisa's foolish determination. Anne wonders if he now reconsiders the virtue of unwavering resolution, if he might realize that possessing a persuadable temper might also have its advantages and wisdom. Captain Wentworth consults her opinion on how to break the news to the Musgroves, and Anne is touched at this appeal to her good judgment. He informs the Musgroves of the accident, drops off Anne and Henrietta, and returns to Lyme himself.

Captain Wentworth's regrets ultimately lead him to recognize the dire consequences of an unwavering and self-assured will, as well as his responsibility in failing to save Louisa. The accident leads him to a full appreciation of his own errors and Anne's merits, which he comes to esteem as infinitely superior to Louisa's.

CHAPTER 13

Louisa recovers slowly under the capable Mrs. Harville's care. Various family friends bring updates of her health. Anne makes herself helpful around the distressed Uppercross household, and after persuading the entire Musgrove family to visit Louisa at Lyme, she decides to visit Lady Russell in Kellynch.

Anne continues to display her capability, sensibility, and compassion in her interactions with the Musgroves. These qualities also give her advice considerable weight among those who know how to properly appreciate them.

Anne leaves Uppercross with mixed feelings; it has been a place of some reconciliation and friendship, but also renewed grief. Lady Russell receives Anne with some anxiety, but is delighted to find her improved in plumpness and looks. Anne finds it hard to adjust again to the concerns of Lady Russell—that of her father and Elizabeth—which so differ from the events that have recently absorbed the Musgroves. Anne informs her about the attachment between Captain Wentworth and Louisa.

Lady Russell further affirms Anne's returning vitality and beauty, which may be attributed to the confidence that she has gained during her time with the Musgroves. The recent events confirm her helpfulness and abilities—as well as Captain Wentworth's returning regard, if not romantic feelings for her.

Lady Russell and Anne call on Mrs. Croft. Though Anne is pained to have her home occupied by others, she has the highest regard for the Crofts. They discuss the accident at Lyme, and the Crofts report that Captain Wentworth has praised her helpfulness in all of it. Admiral Croft kindly invites Anne to make herself at home as she pleases, demonstrating a generous sensitivity to her feelings. The Crofts will soon vacation, and Lady Russell and Anne plan to visit Bath, thus ending all danger of future encounters between Anne and Captain Wentworth at **Kellynch**.

Anne's feelings towards her aristocratic heritage and home are further nuanced in her visit to the Crofts; though she is not vain and possessive like Sir Walter and Elizabeth, she possesses a real and touching attachment to the estate as her home. She sincerely grieves its loss and the degradation of her family, even as she esteems the new tenants and recognizes their model behavior and marriage.

CHAPTER 14

Charles and Mary return to Uppercross, reporting that Louisa is recovering well though still weak. Mary has had an enjoyable stay bathing, reading, churching, and perceiving herself as useful, although it is clear Mrs. Harville has been doing all the work. Anne inquires after Captain Benwick, and Charles amusedly reports of his great admiration for Anne; he is convinced that Captain Benwick will soon be visiting **Kellynch**, intriguing Lady Russell, although Mary peevishly disagrees. Whether from shyness or lack of interest, however, Captain Benwick fails to visit.

The evidence of Anne's desirability, first displayed in Lyme with the admiring stranger and friendship with Captain Benwick, increases with Charles's report about Benwick's affections. Mary's delusional self-importance and petty jealousy continue to contrast Anne's combination of perceptiveness and humility.

The Musgroves return to Uppercross, restoring the house to its familial cheer. Henrietta and Captain Wentworth remain at Lyme to nurse Louisa, who is rapidly improving and is expected home soon. Anne dreads joining her sister and father in Bath, but learns from Elizabeth the intriguing news that Mr. Elliot is also at Bath. He has been seeking to renew relations between their families. Lady Russell and Anne are both curious and desire to see him.

The affairs of the Musgroves are again contrasted with those of the Elliots: the Musgroves remain cheerful, loving, and bustling even as they cope with Louisa's accident, and Anne feels some grief at having to leave them and join her rather silly and cold father and sister in Bath.

CHAPTER 15

Sir Walter and Elizabeth have found Bath much to their satisfaction. They greet her with unexpected warmth, though they display little interest in the affairs of Uppercross or **Kellynch**. Anne wonders that their vanities are so satisfied by the cheap thrills of a small town, after leaving Kellynch Hall.

Anne displays a different kind of pride than her father and sister, as she regards their high satisfaction with Bath with a mixture of amusement and pity. She possesses a more refined estimation of the values and meaning of aristocracy.

Sir Walter and Elizabeth are delighted with Mr. Elliot. Mr. Elliot has explained away all his prior behavior as misunderstanding, and taken considerable pains to renew relations and display his respect for aristocratic lineage; they find him flawless. His prior marriage is excused because his wife was exceedingly good-looking and in love with him.

Mr. Elliot receives a universally charming welcome from the Elliots, much as Captain Wentworth among the Musgroves. However, the former's charm is not in warmth or openness but in sensibility, refinement, and his ability to please.

Anne wonders at his efforts for reconciliation, guessing it may be for Elizabeth's sake. Mrs. Clay and Elizabeth believe him to be interested, and Anne reflects that Mr. Elliot may not have been aware of her character flaws; he seemed a sensible man at their last encounter. Sir Walter complains about how plain looking the women at Bath are.

Anne is more perceptive and suspicious than her father and sister, sensing a dissonance between Mr. Elliot's past and present behavior. However, she believes him a wonderful and sensible gentleman, worthier than her own sister Elizabeth.

Just then, Mr. Elliot visits. Anne is shyly amused and pleased to find him as admiring of her as ever; he is surprised and delighted to discover that the lovely stranger he encountered at Lyme is his cousin. Anne finds his manners very good, polished, and sensible. He demonstrates an earnest solicitude and engagement with Anne's suffering at Lyme. After he leaves, Anne reflects that her first evening at Bath has been far more pleasant than anticipated.

Anne is pleased with Mr. Elliot, and she perceives and prioritizes the attributes of sensibility, manners, and sincere solicitude that Sir Walter and Elizabeth—for all their admiration for Mr. Elliot—remain insensible of. Anne has found appreciation from Mr. Elliot in Bath, where she expected only her indifferent family.

CHAPTER 16

Sir Walter and Elizabeth insist that Mrs. Clay continue to stay with them even after Anne's arrival, increasing Anne's concern about the development of an attachment between her father and Mrs. Clay. Lady Russell continues to find Sir Walter and Elizabeth's favoritism towards Mrs. Clay over Anne provoking and improper. However, she finds Mr. Elliot utterly delightful, endowed with good understanding, propriety, and warmth. Anne realizes that she and her friend disagree on certain matters: Lady Russell finds his desire to reconcile with the Elliots perfectly natural, while Anne suspects Elizabeth as his motive.

The evil of Mrs. Clay's marriage to Sir Walter lies in her inferior social class and obsequious character. It is also worth noting that any son born of such a marriage would immediately become the heir to Sir Walter's baronetcy. Anne and Lady Russell agree that such a match should be prevented, though they continue to differ on their assessment of Mr. Elliot.

Despite their regard for each other, Anne and Mr. Elliot do not always agree. When Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret, their estranged noble cousins, arrive in Bath, Sir Walter and Elizabeth make every effort to connect with them. Anne is dismayed by their obsession with rank, as she finds these cousins dull and unintelligent. She defines good company as "clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversation." Mr. Elliot asserts the importance of good family connections; high-ranking families attract good company, and their family's social set stands out in a place like Bath. He confides that he is also concerned about Sir Walter's attachment to Mrs. Clay.

As Anne grows more confident in her judgment and powers of discernment, she becomes more comfortable with disagreements between her and those she respects. She respects Mr. Elliot, but feels that his estimation of good company in terms of family connections to be misguided; she feels that good company is defined by good conversation more than rank. However, they both agree that Mrs. Clay is decidedly not good company for Sir Walter.

CHAPTER 17

Anne renews her acquaintance with a former school friend, Miss Hamilton. Lately widowed, the now Mrs. Smith had married a wealthy man whose death left her impoverished. In addition, she has been crippled from a severe rheumatic fever and has arrived in Bath for health reasons. Unable to afford even a servant, she is excluded from society.

Mrs. Smith is the first impoverished character in the novel, and she illustrates the extent to which women are dependent on numerous factors (primarily men) for their health, wealth, and rank. Further, as an impoverished and crippled widow, she is a social pariah.

The twelve years since they last saw each other have transformed Anne from a blooming, silent girl to an elegant woman with gentle and kind manners, while they have transformed Mrs. Smith from health and confidence to poor, infirm widowhood. She now sells needlework for a living and attended by a nurse, who brings her gossip. Nonetheless, Mrs. Smith's trials have not dispelled her good sense and spirits. Anne marvels at her resilience and attributes her joy to an "elasticity of mind," which enables her to find comfort, positivity, and employment even in the midst of hardship.

As women in patriarchal England, both are indebted to factors outside of their control or merit for their current situation. Mrs. Smith was once wealthy, married, and healthy; her fall in fortune has precipitated from the disaster of her husband's death and illness. Yet Austen also suggests that elasticity of mind such as Mrs. Smith's may cultivate resilience in all circumstances—another tribute to the virtue of flexible dispositions over fixed wills.

When Anne turns down a dinner invitation with the Dalrymples because of a previously arranged visit to Mrs. Smith, Sir Walter and Elizabeth discover their renewed friendship with disdain. They feel such a connection to be degrading.

That Sir Walter and Elizabeth include Mrs. Clay in their intimate circle but scorn Mrs. Smith, both widows, reveals a degree of inconsistency and lack of discernment in assessing good company, privileging wealth merely for wealth's sake.

Lady Russell later reports to Anne that Mr. Elliot displayed the highest regard for her during dinner. He finds her a most extraordinary young woman, and admires her compassionate visits to Mrs. Smith. Lady Russell has become convinced that his interest is in Anne, not Elizabeth; she is greatly pleased by the suitability of such a match and would love to see Anne succeed her mother as Lady Elliot of **Kellynch** Hall. However, while Anne finds Mr. Elliot agreeable and sensible, she distrusts his past; he is neither open nor warm, and is too generally pleasing to everyone.

Lady Russell's persuasive power over Anne has diminished with time, as Anne in her maturity trusts her own discernment more. Although the pull of duty and love embodied in the vision of holding her mother's aristocratic title is still strong for Anne, she also perceives qualities in Mr. Elliot that make her reluctant to marry him.

CHAPTER 18

A letter arrives from Mary, delivered with the compliments of the Crofts who have just arrived in town. Mary writes with surprising news that Louisa and Captain Benwick are to be married. Anne marvels at this match between the lively and spirited Louisa and quiet and pensive Benwick, but she resolves the puzzle by reflecting on the unusual circumstances of their mutual stay with the Harvilles—Louisa as she recovered from her concussion, and Benwick as he recovered from mourning. Anne is pleased for them and feels joy at the prospect of Captain Wentworth "unshackled and free."

Captain Benwick and Louisa's engagement comes as a surprise, but provides fodder for the novel's exploration of what makes a good match. Austen suggests that chance may actually play a greater role than real discernment or compatibility; the two are unsuited for each other in temperament, personality, and interests, but they are both apparently eager to fall in love and marry and are in proximity to each other because of Louisa's injury and extended stay in Lyme. Their engagement also conveniently frees up Captain Wentworth.

The Crofts have as many acquaintances in Bath as they please, but they dutifully take up their connection with the Elliots. Anne sees them regularly, and she often observes them taking daily walks and sharing in everything together, confirming her impression of their marital happiness. One morning, Admiral Croft and Anne run into each other and they engage in warm and friendly conversation. They discuss the engagement between Louisa and Benwick; Anne delicately inquires as to Captain Wentworth's feelings on the matter, and Admiral Croft relates that Captain Wentworth appears perfectly satisfied with the match in his letter—there is nothing to suggest any feeling of ill-usage or lingering attachment to Louisa. He remarks that Captain Wentworth ought to come to Bath, where there are many available and pretty young women.

Admiral and Mrs. Croft, on the other hand, present a model of a good marriage. They are well-suited for each other and clearly devoted to one another; they share all their activities together, and they are both sensible individuals. They also appear to take equal involvement in managing their daily affairs. Anne's conversation with Admiral Croft suggests that Captain Wentworth's attachment to Louisa was weak. Admiral Croft's mention of the opportunities for partners at Bath affirms the importance of marriage for the eligible Captain Wentworth.

CHAPTER 19

One day, Anne goes out with Elizabeth, Mrs. Clay, and Mr. Elliot. Because of rain, it is decided that Elizabeth and Mrs. Clay will take a ride with Lady Dalrymple while Anne walks back with Mr. Elliot. As they wait in a store, Captain Wentworth arrives with another group; for the first time, he seems more flustered than Anne in their encounter. They awkwardly discuss the Musgroves. Elizabeth proudly refuses to acknowledge him, paining Anne. Mrs. Clay and Elizabeth depart. Captain Wentworth offers Anne his umbrella, when Mr. Elliot returns to whisk her away. The ladies in Captain Wentworth's group discuss the Elliots; they suspect that Mr. Elliot means to marry Anne.

The meeting between Anne and Captain Wentworth marks a change in their dynamic. When Captain Wentworth first encountered Anne at Uppercross, he was cool and indifferent, the subject of everyone's admiration, while she was overcome with emotion. Now, he is embarrassed and discomfited, while she greets him with composure and has the admiring Mr. Elliot at her side. In addition, Captain Wentworth is no longer surrounded by admiration, as Elizabeth's scorn proves.

For her own part, Anne cannot understand Captain Wentworth's feelings—whether he suffers over Louisa. The next day, Lady Russell pretends not to see Captain Wentworth passing opposite the street to them. Anne is weary of all the social activities they have been engaging with at Bath, and she looks forward to a concert at which she anticipates encountering Captain Wentworth. When she mentions who will be attending the concert to Mrs. Smith, her friend mysteriously hints that their acquaintance may be drawing to a close.

Anne persists in her steadfast concern for and contemplation of Captain Wentworth. The walk with Lady Russell demonstrates to her that her friend remains prejudiced against her former suitor, but Lady Russell's marked indifference now has little sway over Anne's own feelings, in contrast to when Anne was younger. She looks forward to future interactions with Captain Wentworth and anticipates any opportunity to rekindle their former relations.

CHAPTER 20

At the concert, Captain Wentworth greets Anne and the two speak. To Anne's gratification, Sir Walter and Elizabeth acknowledge their acquaintance. Captain Wentworth and Anne make small talk for a while, before discussing Louisa and Captain Benwick. He expresses his doubts as to the goodness of the match; though they have good principles and tempers, there is too great a disparity in manners and mind. Louisa is amiable, but not as intellectual as Benwick, and Captain Wentworth disapproves of Benwick's quick recovery from his first love. Captain Wentworth and Anne are separated during the concert, but Anne is happy from their conversation. She glows over his indifference to Louisa, his wonder at Captain Benwick, and his feelings regarding "a first, strong attachment."

Sir Walter and Elizabeth's acknowledgement of Captain Wentworth is evidence of the change in his social importance; he has returned from the Navy with rank and fortune, which elevates his standing in the eyes of the proud baronet and his haughty daughter. Captain Wentworth's discussion of Louisa as less intelligent also reveals lower regard for her, and his disapproval of Benwick's inconstancy towards his first love hints at his own estimation of enduring love; his feeling that one should not and cannot get over true love so soon hints that he himself has also not gotten over his first love: Anne.

Mr. Elliot seats himself beside her and flirts with her, informing her that his admiration for her has been longstanding—he has known about her virtues from another source long before they met. He expresses the hope that her name may never change, hinting at his desire to marry her.

Mr. Elliot's explicit admiration for Anne confirms her desirability, and it also tests Anne's values: he is highly eligible in terms of wealth, rank, and relation to her, and everyone in her circle supports the match.

Anne experiences some dismay at these hints, but she is mainly preoccupied with Captain Wentworth and the desire to see him again. However, he remains distant for the rest of the concert. At one point, she manages to move towards Captain Wentworth and start up a conversation, but Mr. Elliot pursues her and entreats her to aid him with a translation of some Italian. She reluctantly accedes out of politeness, and a moment later Captain Wentworth bids her a hasty farewell. Startled, she realizes that he is jealous of Mr. Elliot. She is ecstatic, and then anxious, as she wonders how to tell him the truth.

The concert is an evening of tension and drama, heightened by the restraints of decorum that prevent Anne from communicating her real feelings to either Mr. Elliot or Captain Wentworth and dispelling the layers of misunderstanding. Mr. Elliot's admiration also serves to catalyze Anne's realization of Captain Wentworth's continued interest in her, when she understands his feelings to be jealousy.

CHAPTER 21

Anne visits Mrs. Smith, reflecting along the way on Mr. Elliot's attentions with gratitude and regret. She feels that Captain Wentworth will have her love forever. She happily recounts the previous evening to an attentive Mrs. Smith, who seems anxious for all the details. Mrs. Smith believes Anne is in love with Mr. Elliot, suggesting that he is an extremely eligible bachelor and a match her friends must desire as perfectly suited, but Anne corrects her and insists she will never marry Mr. Elliot. She then asks how Mrs. Smith knows Mr. Elliot.

The evening at the concert serves as a climax of sorts, as the previous day's reflections confirms Anne's indifference towards Mr. Elliot in spite of his various recommendations of wealth, rank, relation and Lady Russell's advice, and Anne's enduring attachment to Captain Wentworth after all these years.

After some hesitation, Mrs. Smith shocks Anne by excoriating Mr. Elliot as a cold-blooded and selfish scoundrel. She recounts her history with him: he was once the dear friend of her husband, who often helped him out with money, as he was poor back then. His main motive back then was to become wealthy and independent, which was why he slighted Sir Walter and Elizabeth in favor of marrying a rich woman. He cared nothing for the honor of his lineage, which he held as "cheap as dirt." Mrs. Smith shows Anne a letter from Mr. Elliot as proof, in which he disdains the attentions of the Elliots and threatens to auction **Kellynch**.

Mrs. Smith provides shocking information about Mr. Elliot's past that serves to sever any remaining sympathy that Anne felt towards Mr. Elliot: he was a selfish, greedy, and callous individual. Intriguingly, one of the crimes of character most dwelt upon is his disregard for his aristocratic lineage: Anne is outraged by the contempt he previously displayed towards Kellynch Hall and the baronetcy, revealing her own family pride, which Austen seems also to affirm as valid.

After acquiring his wealth through marriage, Mr. Elliot encouraged Mr. Smith into a life of luxury that financially ruined him. Upon Mr. Smith's death, Mr. Elliot refused to execute his will, leaving the distraught Mrs. Smith to struggle with all the debts.

Nonetheless, Mr. Elliot's greatest crimes include his betrayal of and almost inexplicably cruel disregard of Mrs. Smith after her husband's death.

Time has taught Mr. Elliot to value his inheritance; now that he is rich, he seeks the baronetcy. Once he learned that Sir Walter might remarry, he grew concerned: the birth of a son would disinherit him from **Kellynch**. He renewed their acquaintance with the intention of keeping Mrs. Clay from Sir Walter. While he was truly impressed with Anne, their marriage also figures in his schemes as he wants to write into their marriage contract Sir Walter must not marry Mrs. Clay.

Even as time has changed Anne's sense of her duty to Lady Russell and her family's advice regarding marriage, it has enhanced Mr. Elliot's appreciation for his aristocratic inheritance. His ulterior motives—which Anne suspected all along—are finally made clear as another part of his previous selfish greed.

Anne shudders to think that Lady Russell might have persuaded her into marrying Mr. Elliot. She now believes him to be heartless and cold, his behavior to her friend inexcusable. She decides to inform Lady Russell the truth about his character immediately.

The revelation confirms the superiority of Anne's judgment to her friend Lady Russell's. It also rewards Anne's compassionate renewal of friendship with Mrs. Smith.

CHAPTER 22

When Mr. Elliot visits in the evening and solicits Anne's attention, she finds that her new information renders him altogether insincere and unpleasant. She no longer feels any pity for his affections and is glad when she learns that he will be leaving Bath for a couple days.

Mrs. Smith's information completely changes Anne's regard for Mr. Elliot; all of his admiration and recommendations no longer hold any sway on her sympathies and gratitude.

The next morning, Charles and Mary arrive in a surprise visit. Several of the Musgroves are in town to buy Henrietta wedding clothes. Anne talks with Charles about what a blessing it must be to have parents who are more concerned about their children's happiness than personal ambition in spousal choice.

While Austen makes it clear that there are many facets of a compatible and good marriage, she also affirms the importance of family support: parental approval poses a real challenge or encouragement to young couples.

Anne spends the afternoon with the Musgroves. Mary and Charles argue over their plans for the evening; Charles wants to see a play, but Mary wants to attend her father's party and meet the Dalrymples and Mr. Elliot. Anne remarks that she would much prefer the play over the party, which Captain Wentworth overhears. Sir Walter and Elizabeth arrive to extend their invitation to the Musgroves and Captain Wentworth, before returning home to make party preparations. It is decided that they will all attend the evening party.

The argument between Mary and Charles serves to contrast the values of the Elliots and the Musgroves: Mary is more concerned about social climbing and connection, while Charles finds the prospect of an evening with aristocracy dull. Anne continues to carefully regulate her behavior in an attempt to hint to Captain Wentworth regarding her true feelings, as she supports Charles's inclination and distaste for the Elliots.

CHAPTER 23

Anne spends the day with the Musgroves. Mrs. Musgrove and Mrs. Croft discuss the evils of a long engagement, when there is no certainty as to when a couple might marry. Captain Harville engages Anne in a conversation about which gender is more constant in love. Anne asserts that women are more faithful; they love longest even after hope is gone and forget last, because they live at home, confined with their feelings, whereas men have their profession, pursuits, and business to distract them. Captain Wentworth, writing a letter nearby, drops his quill and startles them; Anne wonders whether he has overheard their conversation. Captain Harville argues that men's passions are stronger, more enduring and bear the "heaviest weather." They agree to disagree.

Mrs. Musgrove and Mrs. Croft's conversation about the evils of a long engagement affirms the early wisdom of Anne in breaking off her engagement with Captain Wentworth, as they had no certainty about when he would earn enough money for them to marry and start a family. The conversation between Captain Harville and Anne provides an interesting commentary on gender differences—both related to different social circumstances as well as physical build—in terms of constancy.

Captain Harville and Captain Wentworth depart to mail his letter. However, Captain Wentworth returns a moment later to hastily slip Anne a note. Upon reading it, she finds a declaration of love: Captain Wentworth had indeed been listening to her speech about the constancy of women, and he asserts his own enduring love for her. He admits that he has been weak and resentful, but he has always loved her and hopes to ascertain her own feelings.

Anne's speech about the constancy of women in love provides the necessary encouragement to Captain Wentworth to precipitate his own declaration of love, which testifies to his constancy—as well as a new understanding of his own errors in the past.

Anne is overwhelmed with emotion. The others fret that she is unwell, and Charles insists on walking her home. They encounter Captain Wentworth on the road, and he replaces Charles at Anne's side. The two of them take a quiet detour and reaffirm their devotion to each other with an even deeper appreciation and tenderness enhanced by the trials of their long separation.

Eight years and many trials have granted Anne and Captain Wentworth an enhanced appreciation for each other and their relationship. They have both grown and learned a great deal about themselves, their loved ones, and what makes a truly good match.

Despite his determination to forget Anne, Captain Wentworth has loved her all along. Though he flirted with Louisa out of angry pride, the events at Lyme taught him to prize Anne's steadiness of principle and gentleness. But just as he came to appreciate all these qualities he had scorned and understand his own heart, he discovered that everyone expected him to marry Louisa. Horrified but honor-bound, he left Lyme for a time and was extremely relieved to learn of her engagement with Captain Benwick.

Ironically, despite the fact that Anne was the "persuadable" one of the couple, it is Captain Wentworth who has gone through the greatest change: though he loved her all along, he has been forced to recognize and repent his pride and resentment, as well as his mistaken notion of firmness of will as the ultimate virtue.

Captain Wentworth recounts the ecstasy and agony of seeing Anne at Bath, where he went immediately in the hopes of winning her back. He was held back by jealousy of Mr. Elliot, whom he believed all her friends and family wished her to marry; Anne gently reminds him that though she yielded to persuasion in youth, the situation and her duties now have changed.

Nonetheless, Anne has also grown over the past eight years; though she continues to recognize the importance of duty and humility in listening to others, she has come to esteem and trust her own judgment more than she did when she was younger.

At home, Anne reflects with wonder and gratitude at the turn of events. That evening at the party, she glows with joy and benevolence. She tells Captain Wentworth that, after reflection, she has no regrets in submitting to Lady Russell's advice—even though the advice may have been poor. She concludes that she behaved rightly, and after all "a strong sense of duty is not bad part of a woman's portion." Captain Wentworth is less ready to forgive Lady Russell, but he realizes that he has been his own worst enemy: his pride kept him from contacting her after he had attained financial means of marriage, which would have spared them six years of separation. He warmly and humbly acknowledges that he will be happier than he deserves in marrying Anne.

Anne and Captain Wentworth come to a mutual understanding of the distinction between firmness of resolution, as it relates to good character, and firmness in folly, as in the case of Louisa's stubbornness. The novel affirms the virtue of "a strong sense of duty" for women in Anne's youthful decision to submit to Lady Russell, even as it affirms the superiority of Anne's judgment of character over Lady Russell's. Time has tempered Captain Wentworth's confidence into a deep humility that acknowledges his good fortune in marrying Anne.

CHAPTER 24

The narrator compares the determination of young couples to marry against all odds with the advantages of Anne and Captain Wentworth, who possess maturity of mind, consciousness of right, and independence of fortune. Now that Captain Wentworth has risen in rank and fortune, he is a suitable match for the daughter of a "foolish, spendthrift baronet." Sir Walter and Elizabeth are reconciled to the marriage. Lady Russell is forced to admit her error of judgment regarding both Mr. Elliot and Captain Wentworth, and as she earnestly desires Anne's happiness as her own daughter, she comes to appreciate Captain Wentworth. Mary is pleased that her sister has married better than the Musgrove sisters and takes some credit for bringing them together.

Austen affirms the mature marriage of Anne and Captain Wentworth, even going so far as to suggest its superiority over more youthful marriages that brashly succeed out of sheer, heedless passion.Anne and Captain Wentworth have developed a deep understanding of their compatibility for each other and a mutual appreciation of each other's merits. Yet their marriage is also enabled by the change in Captain Wentworth's social importance through the Navy, which renders the conclusion more conservative than romantic: Austen's vision of marriage does not neglect pragmatic and worldly considerations.

Mr. Elliot is dismayed and shocked; he departs Bath, mortifying Elizabeth once again, who has yet to find a potential suitor. When Mrs. Clay leaves soon after and takes up residence under Mr. Elliot's protection in London, it becomes clear that he has been working to secure her affections to prevent her marriage to Sir Walter. However, the narrator hints that it is unclear whose wiles will win out—Mrs. Clay may yet secure a marriage to Sir *William* Elliot.

Mr. Elliot and Mrs. Clay are physically removed from the novel's conclusion, as the extent of Mr. Elliot's duplicitous schemes becomes clear: he has been playing two games, both designed to further his hold on inheriting Sir Walter's baronetcy: attempting to marry Anne and detach Mrs. Clay from Sir Walter to ensure he never has a male child that would become his heir. Austen's surprising pairing of Mr. Elliot and Mrs. Clay suggest that the two deserve each other for their schemes on the Elliot family.

While Anne regrets that she has few connections of real merit in friends and family to offer Captain Wentworth in marriage, he warmly attaches himself to her friends Lady Russell and Mrs. Smith. He aids Mrs. Smith in getting some of her husband's money back, and they all remain good friends.

The social connections that Anne desires to give her husband are not just of lineage or wealth, but those of good company and conservation, which neither Sir Walter nor Elizabeth can offer.

Anne and Captain Wentworth enjoy a happy marriage; her tenderness is met in his affection. She delights in being a sailor's wife, and the threat of war is all that can "dim her sunshine," as her husband belongs to that profession even "more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance."

Austen concludes with Anne and Captain Wentworth's model marriage, and the suggestion that the Navy is a praiseworthy profession not only for its national heroism but its more meritocratic means of raising men above their birth, enabling Captain Wentworth to marry his beloved Anne.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Tam, Stephanie. "*Persuasion*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 19 Mar 2014. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Tam, Stephanie. "*Persuasion*." LitCharts LLC, March 19, 2014. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/persuasion.

To cite any of the quotes from *Persuasion* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Austen, Jane. Persuasion. Dover Publications. 1997.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Austen, Jane. Persuasion. Mineola: Dover Publications. 1997.