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Persuasion

Jane Austen · *1817 · original English text*

Eight years after being persuaded to give up the man she loved, a quiet daughter of a vain baronet is given, against hope, a second season of life. Austen's last completed novel is about duty, constancy and the late courage to speak. The reward is not youth recovered, but a love that has been tried.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Was the old persuasion wrong—and can constancy still be blessed when youth has already been spent?

"You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope."
Captain Wentworth, in his letter · Chapter XXIII

Anne Elliot was persuaded, at nineteen, to refuse a poor naval officer, and she has not stopped loving him. The book does not mock all counsel, but it judges a prudence that distrusted providence and undervalued a true character. Wentworth's letter, and Anne's long faithfulness, restore what pride and haste had almost buried.

KEY CHARACTERS

Anne Elliot
duty, constancy, a late spring

Captain Wentworth
pride wounded, love unchanged

Lady Russell
counsel, once mistaken, still loved

Sir Walter Elliot
vanity of rank and looks

Mr. Elliot
plausible heir; a painted surface

The Crofts
a hearty, equal marriage

Louisa Musgrove
willfulness checked at Lyme

Mrs. Smith
poverty, loyalty, useful truth

Captain Harville
friendship that draws out the last speech

A CLAIM ANNE WILL OWN

> *"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."*
> **Anne Elliot** · Chapter XXIII

Grades 9–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01 Kellynch to Let

CHAPTERS I–VI

A vain father retrenches, and the past comes to the door.

- Sir Walter Elliot, pressed by debt, must let Kellynch Hall; Anne's good sense is ignored at home
- The tenants are Admiral and Mrs. Croft—and Mrs. Croft is the sister of **Captain Wentworth**
- Lady Russell, who once advised the refusal, remains Anne's friend and nearly a mother
- Anne, at twenty-seven, is useful, faded in her family's eyes, and unchanged in attachment

02 Uppercross and Lyme

CHAPTERS VII–XII

A meeting without words, and a fall on the Cobb.

- Wentworth comes to visit the Musgroves, who have taken Anne in as a useful relation
- He is courteous and cold; the Musgrove girls are delighted with him
- At Lyme, the party meets his wounded friend Captain Harville and the pale Captain Benwick
- Louisa Musgrove will not be persuaded to wait on the steps; she jumps, falls, and is taken up for dead

> *"She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older: the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning."*
> **narrator** · Chapter IV

03 Bath

CHAPTERS XIII–XVIII

A city of vanity, a cousin's smile, and news that almost ends hope.

- Anne joins her father and elder sister in Bath, a stage made for Sir Walter's pride
- Cousin Mr. Elliot, the heir, is attentive and plausible; Lady Russell begins to favor him
- News comes that Louisa will recover—and that she is to marry Captain Benwick, not Wentworth
- Wentworth himself is soon expected in Bath; Anne hardly knows what she is allowed to hope

04 Old Friends, New Light

CHAPTERS XIX–XXII

A card-party, a concert, and a widow's true history.

- Anne and Wentworth keep meeting in rooms too public for speech
- Mrs. Smith, Anne's poor old schoolfellow, holds the key to Mr. Elliot's character
- He is shown as a man of surface, past cruelty, and present design on the Elliots' name and house
- Lady Russell's second persuasion, toward the heir, is quietly defeated by facts

05 The Letter

CHAPTERS XXIII–XXIV

A conversation overheard, a note written in the same room, and a right ending.

- At the White Hart, Anne speaks with Captain Harville of women's constancy—loving longest, when hope is gone
- Wentworth, writing at the next table, hears her and leaves a letter: he is half agony, half hope
- They walk, speak at last, and are restored
- The Navy has a wife; Kellynch has no improved heir; Anne's spring, late and seasoned, begins

> *"You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope. Tell me not that I am too late, that such precious feelings are gone for ever."*
> **Captain Wentworth, in his letter** · Chapter XXIII

Constancy | Persuasion & Counsel | Pride | Second Chances | True Regard | Duty

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. Chapter IV's sentence about prudence and romance is the narrator's judgment on Anne's lost years. Is all persuasion blamed, or only a prudence that "distrusts Providence"?
2. Wentworth's coldness at Uppercross is a form of pride. Where does he begin to see Anne clearly again, and what does Lyme have to do with it?
3. Louisa's fall is a parable of unpersuadableness. Why is Anne's earlier yielding not treated as the same kind of fault?
4. Mr. Elliot is the foil: right family, wrong character. How does Mrs. Smith's testimony complete what Anne's instinct had already felt?
5. The letter in Chapter XXIII is written in the same room as Anne's speech on loving longest. Read the two together.
6. The Navy in this book is a school of useful rank, set against Sir Walter's empty one. What kind of honor does Anne finally marry?

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