More Justified in Acting

by MorganAW

Summary

A discovery in the Kellynch library gives Captain Wentworth greater insight into events of the past and the possibilities of the future prior to his re-introduction to Anne Elliot causing him to question his long held beliefs regarding their separation.

Notes

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Anne Eliot was miserable. In truth, her spirits rarely rose above melancholy in the past three years. She was nestled into a window seat in the library staring morosely out the window, her diary laying forgotten on her lap as she desperately tried to sort out her feelings. She knew that most women would be happy, if not elated to find themselves in her present circumstances, she had just received an offer of marriage from Charles Musgrove. He was heir to Uppercross, a modest estate not five miles from Kellynch. Her father's sense of superiority would have seen the alliance as a degradation had Mr. Musgrove applied to her beautiful elder sister, Elizabeth – for whom he had much loftier plans – but for Anne, he felt the match would do nicely. The Musgroves held a respectable position in local society and Anne's marriage would take some strain off of his deteriorating funds. Even Lady Russell looked favorably on the match between her favorite goddaughter and the unassuming young squire. Partial as she was to Anne, she had to admit that much of the bloom and vivacity that had been so promising at nineteen had since faded and it was by no means certain that Anne would receive any more eligible offers.

Anne herself, however could not reconcile herself to the match. She had nothing to say against Charles Musgrove, he was always kind, affectionate, polite, and solicitous of her feelings and well being, even if they shared few common interests. She even believed that Charles might actually love her in his own way; and yet, Anne knew with a certainty that she could never return that love. She had never stopped loving Frederick Wentworth – the dashing young Captain she had been persuaded to cast off three years prior – and she simply could not imagine loving any other man.

Even so, Anne had requested time to consider before she gave him an answer. She tried to think rationally over the screaming protests of her heart that she could not bear such a marriage. Charles was offering her a comfortable home, a family, a position in society. She'd always had a fondness for the Musgroves, their loud, happy, loving family had always served as a perfect foil to the cold indifference of her own home since her mother's death. Her father was vain, conceited, and full of his own importance. Her sister Elizabeth, who bore the closest resemblance to Sir Walter in both beauty and personality, was the eldest and served as mistress of Kellynch; she therefore was the only daughter that Sir Walter gave any attention or consequence to. If Anne accepted Charles's offer, she would be free of the oppressive superiority and indifference of her father and older sister and ensconced in the comfort of the Musgroves.

Her tears dropped onto the open pages of her diary as she considered Frederick. They had met in the summer of the year six when he visited his brother in a nearby parish and they had fallen incandescently in love. Anne had never before felt a closer connection to any living being, they both possessed quick intelligence and shared many interests. Their hearts were in perfect harmony and before long he had proposed and she had gleefully accepted. Her father had given his consent reluctantly and threatened to withhold her dowry if she persisted in such a degrading match. Initially,
Anne had paid little heed to her father's superficial complaints. She was certain that she and Frederick were capable of matching any adversity as long as they were together. She was less equal to withstand the more rational arguments of her friend Lady Russel – who had served as a maternal confidant since her own mother's death. Anne had been persuaded that without the benefit of her dowry, a wife would only hinder Frederick's success in his career. In the single most painful moment of her life, she broke off her engagement to the only man she had ever loved. She pleaded with him to listen to her reasons, but his face had contorted with anger and hurt and he stormed away. She had been haunted by that last crushing parting for three years.

She was a sensible girl and knew that he was too wounded by her betrayal to renew his addresses if he had not done so already. Even without any hope of his return, could she marry Charles while her heart was yet full of another? Could she bear a life of spinsterhood if she denied him? She had returned to committing these thoughts to her diary when a servant announced the arrival of Mr. Charles Musgrove. Her face drained of color, her time was up and she must seal her fate. She hastily hid her diary behind some pillows on the window seat before joining him in the drawing room.

In the turmoil of emotions following her interview with Charles, she had quite forgotten about the hidden diary until that evening. When she went to retrieve it she was shocked to discover it missing. Initially she blushed in mortification of her sisters reading her personal thoughts but then realized that Elizabeth would find little interest in her sister's turmoil and Mary was, thankfully, still at school. The room had been tidied, so she was left to pray that a servant had merely misplaced it.
Captain Frederick Wentworth was under assault and unfortunately not the type he was accustomed to at sea. Cannon fire and French bayonets were nothing to the emotional assault of returning to Kellynch. He would far rather be rotting in a French brig than sitting in the lavish library of this illustrious estate. It was the cruelest trick of fate that the Crofts had somehow managed to lease this very house … her house. His initial inclination was to avoid Somerset, Kellynch, and any mention of the Elliots. But it had been nearly five years since he had seen his sister Sophy and nearly a decade since he and Admiral Croft were both ashore at the same time for any length of time. It would be impossible to make his excuses without telling them of his history with Anne. As it was, only seven people were aware of his failed betrothal and that was already far too many for his taste. It was a circumstance he would gladly forget himself if he could. And yet here he was, torturing himself in a room full of ghosts.

This was the very room in which Sir Walter Elliot had abused and berated him for the affront of falling in love with his daughter. Frederick had been so struck by the absurdity of the meeting that he had little notion at the time of the disaster brewing for him. Within the span of one brief rant, Sir Walter had reluctantly given his consent, declaimed Frederick's presumption at aspiring to marry a lady so far above him, belittled Anne's beauty and worth as the least desirable of his daughters, and withheld her rightful dowry if they went through with this 'ill-advised' marriage. Her dowry had mattered little to him as he was confident he would be successful enough to support his wife, and she would be far better off in his care than in her father's neglect. His Anne had bravely withstood her father's opinions and would have married him regardless had it not been for the malicious interference of Lady Russel.

He felt a sharp stab of pain in his heart as another vision came to mind of Anne sitting in this very window seat. She had obviously been crying and allowed him to hold her and comfort her for some minutes before she rallied enough to rip his heart out by breaking their engagement. She had parroted the structured arguments that Lady Russel had prepared regarding his lack of fortune, the insecure prospects of his career, and the hindrance she would be to his future success. *Hindrance!* Of course, he did not believe that Lady Russell had any more noble motives than Sir Walter, but she had calculated her arguments precisely to prey on Anne's weakest points and her campaign had been successful. His Anne had been persuaded against him.

He had never doubted that she loved him all those years ago, just not enough to fight for him. She had proven herself weak and irresolute and thrown aside all of their plans for the future. He turned sideways and leaned his head against the glass, as if turning away from the room would banish the memories that it evoked. Even as he struggled with the painful memories, he hardened his heart against Anne. She could be nothing to him now and he was sure he was nothing to her. The Elliot pride would not allow her to pine away for a lowly sailor for years. He sat there for several minutes attempting to regain control of his emotions before he opened his eyes. A small swatch of green stood out in his eye in the sliver of light that reached behind the mahogany book case abutting the window seat. With the nimble fingers of a practiced sailor, he fished out the small book. He opened it to the first page in idle curiosity and immediately dropped it as if he'd been burned. Surely the universe was laughing at his misery. He picked it up again, too curious to resist its pull.

*Diary of Anne Elliot 1808 ~*

He ran his fingers over the scrawling text, he would recognize her handwriting anywhere. He had a few precious letters which she had written to him during their courtship. The rational portion of his brain had urged him to burn them after she had cast him off, but his heart would not allow it. They
had traveled the world with him, hidden in the bottom of his trunk in his cabin. At first, even in his anger against her desertion, he had read them in his loneliest moments then cursed himself for such weakness. For years now they had remained untouched. He had meant to forget her, and believed it to be done but the sight of her handwriting was so bound to the endearments of her letters and evoked such tender feelings that he at once knew he could never be indifferent to her. As a gentleman, he knew that it was improper to read a lady's diary but he found he could not resist. He lifted the ribbon and opened the diary to the last entry.

August 15, 1809

Charles Musgrove has proposed. I ought to be happy, he is a kind, amiable man who is rather attached to me. Everyone seems to be in favor of the match. Father has given his consent and has even roused himself to congratulate me. Lady Russel is a touch worried that our interests are so different, but believes that we will complement each other nicely and have a happy, if not brilliant marriage. At two and twenty I know that a brilliant match is unlikely. I may never receive another offer. I would like to have my own home, my own family, my own children. And yet...

How can I throw myself away on a marriage of convenience when I have known love, passion, and equality of mind? I know there is no hope for me and my dearest Frederick but he will always be my dearest, even if we are forever separated. Would it be fair to Charles? He insists that my love for him will grow in time, but he does not know that my heart already belongs to another.

I suppose part of the problem is that I do like and respect Charles. I have known him since we were children and have been aware of his partiality for me for nearly as long. If it were some mere acquaintance who was only looking for a sensible wife and was not attached it would be different but where am I to find such a man? Single men are scarce in the neighborhood and gentlemen that my father would approve of are even scarcer. Elizabeth's idea of economy is to exclude me from the annual trip to London and I detest Bath.

With no other options available to me, am I prepared to commit myself to a life of spinsterhood? To remain a burden on my father's strained resources? To allow Elizabeth to heap all privations on my shoulders while she bleeds the coffers? And what would become of me when father dies and Mr. Elliot inherits? With the current breach between father and Mr. Elliot over his unfortunate marriage, what could induce him or his wife to support me when they inherit?

If only ________

The last trailed off with a small line as if she had been surprised while writing and the splotches on the facing page indicated that she had hastily closed the book before the ink dried. He foolishly flipped the page, hoping for further information, for resolution but there was nothing. His finger traced over the words “my dearest Frederick” which were slightly marred by tear stains. Her tears. For him. For their lost future. She loved him then, years after Frederick sailed away from her, but what of now? Was she married? Was she persuaded into an unwanted marriage as easily as she was persuaded out of a desired marriage? His heart squeezed at the thought. At that moment when all seemed lost he finally knew his own heart. He had imagined himself indifferent, when he had only been angry; in truth he had never stopped loving her.

Such an account was not to be soon recovered from. Half an hour's solitude and reflection might have tranquillized him; but the ten minutes only which now passed before he was interrupted, with
all the restraints of his situation, could do nothing towards tranquility.

“Well Frederick, here you are. We have had a delightful drive through the neighborhood. It's a shame the gig seats only two, you ought to take a horse and explore for yourself one of these days.” Admiral Croft imparted as he bustled into the room. “By the by, we ran across one of our neighbors in the lane and are invited for dinner tomorrow evening at Uppercross. You remember Mr. Musgrove, he called on us when you first arrived.”

_Musgrove!_ Frederick remembered the man as a ruddy, pleasant, older gentleman. Anne couldn't be married to him, could she? He's old enough to be her father! “Yes, was that a Mr. Charles Musgrove?” Only years of command allowed Frederick to maintain a steady voice despite his agitation.

“Hm? No, no, Charles is his son. Pleasant young fellow, rather slow for any active profession, mad about hunting though. I dare say you will meet him and his wife at dinner.”

“Wife?” The desperation was surely seeping into his voice at this stage.

“Aye, a rather fine young woman, she used to be one of the Miss Elliots. One of her sisters is visiting them, and there are two charming young Miss Musgroves though I never can recall which is which. I wish young ladies had not such a number of fine Christian names. I should never be out if they were all Sophys, or something of that sort.”

If the Admiral noted Frederick's lapse into silence, he did not remark upon it. One thought kept ricocheting across his brain: _Oh God, she's married!_ He was too late. If eight years had been insufficient to purge his heart of Anne Elliot, he doubted he'd ever succeed and now he was doomed to a life without her. Could he bear to see her at dinner with her husband, surrounded by that lucky man's family? Would her children be there? The same arguments which had compelled him to visit Kellynch against his better judgment would of course compel him to visit Uppercross. It would be unaccountably rude to cry off with no reason and revealing his reasons to the Musgroves would only make things uncomfortable for Anne.
Anne Elliot watched from the nursery window as her sister and brother-in-law walked to the great house where they would be introduced to Captain Wentworth. Frederick. She could never be happy for a child's injury, yet she was grateful that little Charles's accident gave her a reprieve from a most painful meeting. Still, as happy as she was to be useful she could not approve of Mary and Charles's behavior this evening, leaving their injured heir at home in the care of others while they went out to be happy. Of course, they were always a bit selfish and accustomed to behaving just as they chose. As for herself, she was left with as many sensations of comfort, as were, perhaps, ever likely to be hers. She knew herself to be of the first utility to the child; and what was it to her if Frederick Wentworth were only half a mile distant, making himself agreeable to others?

She would have liked to know how he felt as to a meeting. Perhaps indifferent, if indifference could exist under such circumstances. He must be either indifferent or unwilling. Had he wished ever to see her again, he need not have waited till this time; he would have done what she could not but believe that in his place she should have done long ago, when events had been early giving him the independence which alone had been wanting.

She had long since given up hope of his returning for her, or returning her feelings. While she could never cease loving him, over time the pain had numbed and she had settled in to her sad life. This sudden reappearance, however, was almost too much to bear. How could she be content as the spinster aunt while the only man she had ever loved was so near, reminding her of what could have been. She could bear being pushed to the side by her family, she was rather used to neglect, but she was not certain she could withstand such neglect from her Frederick.

She also knew that the Miss Musgroves were quite ready to be fallen in love with and Captain Frederick Wentworth was just the sort of romantic hero they were lacking in their confined society. She had never doubted that he would move on with his life: Fall in love, marry, have children. She had almost convinced herself that she could be happy for him when the future Mrs. Wentworth was a faceless woman in a distant county. The prospect of Henrietta or Louisa Musgrove taking the place which she would have claimed had she not been swayed by Lady Russel's advice was almost too much to bear. She would have to see their courtship, attend their wedding, watch their family grow.

Little Charles called out for her and she hastily dried her eyes before turning to the child, a smile upon her face. She would endure.

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Frederick entered the drawing room of Uppercross with trepidation. His eyes scouted the room searching in vain for Anne as Mr. Musgrove rose and made an exaggerated welcome to his home. He then began the introductions: “My wife, Mrs. Musgrove,” he gestured toward a jolly, plump matron. “My daughters Miss Henrietta and Miss Louisa,” he turned toward two handsome but insipid girls who preened toward him, “and my son and daughter-in-law Mr. and Mrs. Charles Musgrove,” he ended on a jovial plain man and a delicate woman with her nose in the air – ah, the Elliot countenance. He blinked as the realization began to set in.

“Mrs. Charles Musgrove?” She nodded and his smile grew of its own accord, probably giving Mrs. Musgrove the wrong impression of his intent. “Formerly Miss Mary Elliot?”

“Indeed Captain, have we been introduced?” She asked with a bemused smile.
His good intentions for circumspection fled as the weight lifted off of his chest. She is not married!

“No, no, though I have heard much about you. I was acquainted with your sister some years ago when I visited my brother when he was the curate at Monkford. I understood she would be here tonight as well.” He knew it was imprudent to reveal the depth of their acquaintance before he ascertained Anne's feelings, but he feared she had stayed away to avoid him.

“My sister Elizabeth is in Bath with my father Sir Walter Elliot, Baronet.” Those two personages he would gladly forget, and the way Mary Musgrove casually dropped her father's title into the conversation revealed that she was likely closer in her ideas of consequence to her father and Elizabeth than to Anne. “My sister Anne is making an extended visit with us at Uppercross Cottage, but was unable to join us this evening as she is attending my son following an accident.” Her speech ended with an exaggerated sigh and a delicate dabbing of her eyes.

“Little Charles unfortunately fell out of a tree yesterday. He dislocated his collarbone and sustained an injury to his back. He is getting on well now, but Anne did not like to leave him alone with just his nurse tonight.” Mr. Charles Musgrove clarified.

“I wonder that you find yourself able to leave him so soon after such an injury and yet your sister remains Mrs. Musgrove. Has there been any damage to the spine?”

“Well! As the apothecary examined him this morning and ascertained that the bulk of the danger had passed, and as my husband was coming up to the house I saw no harm in joining him. The apothecary is still concerned about some complaint of the spine or other, but... Oh! Anne would be better able to explain it,” she stammered in reply.

“Oh yes, Anne is the best nurse!” Cried Louisa energetically, apparently trying to draw the attention back to herself.

“And her temperament so well suited to the sickroom!” Added Henrietta, not to be outdone by her sister.

Frederick smiled as he settled into a chair. “As I recall, she was nearly as qualified as some ship's surgeons I've had and has a far better bedside manner.”

“I imagine she's a much more pleasant sight to wake to than most ship's surgeons as well,” added the Admiral gruffly. Frederick was momentarily struck dumb by the alluring vision of waking to see Anne's face but luckily his companions merely laughed at the Admiral's remark and the conversation moved on to more general topics. The evening progressed pleasantly there had been music, singing, talking, laughing, all that was most agreeable. The Miss Musgroves were, perhaps a bit too eager to please and be pleased – as girls just out of the schoolroom are wont to be – but Frederick's spirits were so heightened by the revelation that Anne Elliot was not married to be much bothered by anything.

Of course, he wouldn't let himself get too far ahead of himself, he was still unsure of her feelings. Her caring heart and propensity as a nursemaid might be excuse enough for her absence tonight, but she may still be avoiding him. He had not seen her in over eight years but he keenly felt her absence this evening. Therefore, when Charles Musgrove invited him shooting in the morning, he did not hesitate to ask if he could call at Uppercross Cottage to pay his respects to the ladies and inquire as to the health of the boy. Mrs. Charles Musgrove was delighted by the scheme and invited him to breakfast at the cottage before the shooting. Noting the dejected looks on the Miss Musgroves, Mr. Musgrove offered breakfast at the Great House instead. As that would not suit his purposes at all, Frederick insisted that as Mrs. Charles issued her invitation first he would break his fast at the cottage. Tomorrow. He would see Anne tomorrow.
The morning hours of the Cottage were always later than those of the other house, and on the
morrow Anne was surprised to find Mary awake and preparing for breakfast when she came down.
She was informed that Captain Wentworth would be arriving presently to join them for breakfast
before the shooting. A thousand feelings rushed on Anne, of which this was the most consoling, that
it would soon be over. She had barely a moment to prepare herself before she heard his quick rap at
the door, just as Charles was rushing down the stairs muttering about being late. Anne gripped a
chair for support as Charles led Captain Wentworth into the room and she caught her first glimpse of
him. The years which had destroyed her youth and bloom had only given him a more glowing,
manly, open look, in no respect lessening his personal advantages. He was the same Frederick
Wentworth she had fallen in love with.

He made his bow to Mary then turned to Anne and did the unthinkable, he smiled. It was not the
carefree smile of the year six, it was cautious, unsure, and perhaps even hopeful. Anne could not
prevent a corresponding smile in response, equal parts surprise, timidity, and hope. He bowed to her
and said, “Miss Anne, it is a pleasure to see you again, it has been far too long.”

Anne was flustered. Not only was he acknowledging her acquaintance, but implying that he had
missed her presence. If that was the case, why hadn't he returned sooner? “Indeed Captain
Wentworth, when your brother left the curacy of Monkford we had little hope of ever seeing you
again,” she replied with a curtsy. His intense gaze bore into her, but she could not fathom their
meaning.

“And how fares the little invalid?” He roused himself to ask.

“He is far better. Mr. Robinson, the apothecary, has seen him again this morning and the swelling
around the spine seems to have gone down, the tingling in his legs is receding and he can move them
with ease. The problem now is to keep him from moving too much until the muscles heal.”

“I am familiar with the type of injury, it is common amongst unskilled young midshipmen falling
from the rigging. It can be rather touch and go and restraining the activity of an active young boy can
be difficult. He is lucky to have such a capable nurse at hand.”

Anne looked down and blushed at such praise. She did not know how to interpret his behavior. She
had expected indifference, perhaps disdain, part of her had hoped for the return of the ardent lover.
She wasn't sure what to do with this cautious civility. Was he intending them to meet as common and
indifferent acquaintances? “My duties now, I fear, are more of entertainment rather than nursing. He
is growing rather restless.”

Here Mary interjected herself into the conversation, requiring her own fair share. Breakfast
proceeded with pleasant conversation on common matters. Captain Wentworth never alluded to a
closer relationship between themselves, but he was sure to include her in all conversation and
continued to pay her subtle complements. He was charming, Anne was charmed. For the first time in
eight years she felt herself truly happy.

That is, of course, until the Miss Musgroves intruded into the room. Though their expressed purpose
was to visit Mary and inquire after Little Charles, their attention was quickly diverted to Captain
Wentworth. They dominated the conversation for the rest of the meal with their flirtations. Before
long, breakfast was cleared and Charles announced that it was time for the men to depart. Their
visitor had bowed and was gone, the Miss Musgroves were gone too, suddenly resolving to walk to
the end of the village with the sportsmen.
At that moment, Anne wished nothing more than a quiet room to think. Her emotions were too high to fully attend to Mary's fluttering pronouncements. The worst was over. They had met. They had been once more in the same room. Though they had not reached the level of ease or intimacy which they had lost, he had been so kind and rather attentive.

"...It will be such a match for Henrietta!" Mary's prattling finally penetrated Anne's musings with this proclamation.

“What?” Anne responded in alarm. “She has but just met him last evening,”

“I know, but they are off to a promising beginning. Long courtships are not the done thing in the Navy you know.”

“I detected no particular attachment on his side, he treated her with the same geniality as he did Louisa or …” Anne had to bite her tongue to prevent giving herself away, “or you.”

“Oh yes! He was excessively attentive to me!” Preened Mary, “I dare say he may choose Louisa, but it would be so convenient at this moment for Henrietta to be swayed from Charles Hayter!”

“But Mr. Hayter is such a nice young man, and so very fond of Henrietta.”

“I dare say, but he is such an unfortunate relation to have.”

“We do not know that Captain Wentworth is even looking to marriage at present,” Anne murmured weakly, endeavoring to convince herself as much as Mary.

“Well, he is a single man in possession of a good fortune, he must be in want of a wife, and as Henrietta and Louisa are quite the most eligible girls in the county, he will certainly marry one of them.” Anne felt the sting of Mary's thoughtless words. At seven and twenty, she was no longer considered an eligible match for a dashing young man even by her own sister.

At this point their alarming discussion was cut short by the arrival of the Miss Musgroves themselves who returned to express how perfectly delighted they were with Captain Wentworth, how much handomer, how infinitely more agreeable they thought him than any individual among their male acquaintance, who had been at all a favorite before. In short, he had looked and said everything with such exquisite grace, that they could assure them all, their heads were both turned by him.

Anne quietly slipped out of the room in despair on the pretense of checking on Little Charles. It was true that Frederick had shown no particular attachment to any of the young ladies, herself included. She had allowed her hopes to be raised by his easy manner and recognition of her as an acquaintance when he had shown her nothing but civility. She knew that she had lost her youth and beauty over the years and could not stand in comparison to the Miss Musgroves. Her hopes were again dashed and she was plunged into misery.

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Kellynch, October 22 1814

Again ensconced in the window seat of the Library, Frederick took stock of his day. He had seen Anne! She was as gentle and clever and proper as ever. Basking in her shy smiles across the table throughout breakfast he felt as if a part of him he hadn't realized was missing was restored to him. He couldn't remember when he had last enjoyed a meal as much but would wager that it had been in the summer of six. There was, of course, some awkwardness in this first meeting. That could not be helped, but he felt it fading away as the meal wore on. Until those silly girls intruded, that is. Sure, the Miss Musgroves were pleasant enough company, but they did tend to hang about him. He could
also sense Anne's retreat as soon as they entered the room.

His first priority was to discover her current feelings for him. He was certain that she wasn't indifferent to him, her blushes and agitation confirmed that, but they could have been the result of embarrassment as well. Having been once rejected, he was unwilling to risk exposure until he had some confirmation. He needed to get Anne alone and ascertain her feelings, but that may be difficult. The Musgrove girls gave every indication of following him like puppies and Charles Musgrove seemed to take an eager interest in his sister-in-law's affairs. Frederick had bristled every time Charles complemented or smiled at Anne. Even after he married her own sister, it was clear that the man still had feelings for her! Not that he could judge, he knew better than anyone that Anne Elliot was not easily dislodged from one's heart.

Frustrated that he hadn't gained any further insight into Anne's heart and desperate to feel near her, he turned again to her surrogate and perused her diary. She wrote on a wide range of topics. Interspersed with discussions of literature, snippets of poetry, translations from French and Italian, and details of her daily life were glimpses at her feelings. He found his own name far more often than he would have expected. While his mind had been turned to glory, honor, and riches on the sea, she was left to contemplate the workings of her heart. He found clippings from newspapers detailing his triumphs, excerpts from the Navy List for each new ship he commanded, fond memories, small occurrences that she would have liked to share with him, and frequent lamentations about the mistakes of the past. Entries about him were frequently spattered with tear stains and it broke his heart every time. Some of the passages chilled him to the core.

January 26, 1808

I spoke to Mr. Wentworth today, it was the first time we've had any real conversation since Frederick left. I believe he has been avoiding me and given the circumstances I do not blame him. Thus far I've been too timid to approach him, but as he will be leaving the parish soon, I thought it might be my only chance. He is the only person I can turn to for information regarding my dearest Frederick. Of course, he was not initially forthcoming. I believe he still blames me for breaking his brother's heart. He needn't have bothered with his recriminations, I already blame myself. If there were any way to take that pain solely on myself I would in an instant. I would not hurt Frederick for the world had I any other option, but I was truly convinced that I acted for the best.

For all of his recriminations and all of my penitence, he did finally give me some information on my beloved though not all to my satisfaction. He has been made Captain of the Sloop the Asp – this much I knew from the Navy List – But Frederick wrote to him that the sloop was barely seaworthy! It had been scheduled to be decommissioned but was relaunched as a result of the demand for ships due to the war. I had been consoling myself with the fact that Frederick had so quickly been given a command. Surely he was hale and hearty and safe, living his dreams on the sea. These were obviously naive wishes, but having released him of his obligation it was comforting to think of him succeeding in his profession at least. Now I learn that he is in constant danger not only from the French and the common dangers of the sea, but in a dangerous ship as well. If he took this reckless step because of me … If he were to sink! With Mr. Wentworth going away, would I even learn if he were to perish? Would the papers report on the sinking of a derelict sloop? Would I continue in vain to search for news of him, unaware that my dear heart lay cold and dead on the ocean floor? I could not bear it. I don't believe I shall be able to sleep soundly until I am sure he is safely ashore.

She was too good, too caring. He had thought her unfeeling of his pain when she broke the
engagement, but her sorrow over his pain was visceral. He would have to have words with Edward about telling Anne of his danger, what was the man thinking! Although, he was not blameless there either. In truth he had boarded that ship fairly indifferent as to whether he safely returned or not. He had been heartbroken, angry, and reckless. He should not have been so open with his brother about his recklessness and it was reasonable for Edward to blame Anne for that recklessness. He had no idea it would affect her this deeply.

July 30, 1808

Thank Heavens! Frederick is safely ashore! The newspaper reports that the Asp limped into the port at Plymouth scarce hours before a horrid storm. To think that he may have survived all of that time asea and in battle only to be dashed on British rocks as he returned home. It is too horrible to think it. I have now some hollow comfort in the knowledge that I probably did promote his career in breaking our engagement when I did. I doubt Frederick would have taken command of the Asp had we married. Neither of us had the ready funds to rent rooms for me, and I can't imagine Frederick allowing me to go with him on such a dangerous ship. It would have been too risky. He would have been more careful and missed an opportunity at his first real command.

As it is, he is home safe and in possession of some fortune. Not that his fortune was ever my goal, but now that he has the means to support a wife, will he come back to me?

Does he remember me? Dare I hope he still loves me? I know I should scarcely hope, but a small glimmer has begun to shine. I must wait to see my fate. For now I shall rejoice that he has returned unharmed and hope that his next ship is of a sturdier build.

By God! She would have accepted me! Had I only attempted to contact her when I returned, before I sailed on the Laconia! Of course he had thought of it. He remembered bitterly laughing as he sat in the harbor that first evening at the fact that he had been correct. Scarcely two years on and he had made his fortune, all of Lady Russell's officious interference had been for naught. Pride! He had long blamed the officious pride of the Elliots and Lady Russell for ruining his happiness, but his own wounded pride had stretched the period of sorrow even further! Six years! They could have been married for six years by now. His shame deepened at her logic regarding the Asp. He never would have allowed her to sail with him aboard the Asp! That pile of tinder was far to decrepit for such precious cargo. And yet, he hadn't really thought of such considerations before he proposed. He had assumed she would live aboard ship with him as his wife. He truly hadn't had the means at that point to set her up in her own establishment. He perhaps could have lodged her with another sailor's wife but Sophy was in the West Indies and Harville hadn't married yet. He wasn't certain who would have taken her in.

August 9, 1808

Today is my birthday. I have reached my one and twentieth year, I am of age. I could leave my father's home. I could go to Plymouth and search for Frederick, plead my case. Let him know how deeply I miss him and how much I have come to regret my decision. Upon seeing me, he would of course be swept away by his own feelings, procure a special license, and marry me before the day is out.

Of course, I would never do such a thing. Even at the ripe age of one and twenty, an unaccompanied gentle born woman would be a target. I have no money to entice a maid to join me to make it respectable. Assuming I arrived in Plymouth unharmed, how would I find Frederick? Is he even still there? Would he want to see me? If he cast me off I would be ruined. Ruined in the eyes of society. Prey to adventurers and thieves. Broken hearted. I could not survive it. As it is, I can survive on the merest scrap of hope
that he may some day come back for me, but I could not bear it if I were to look into his eyes and see contempt. Can one indeed die of a broken heart?

Father informed me that money was tight this year after their trip to London and gave me only some ribbons for my birthday. Elizabeth hosted an evening in to celebrate my birthday. She ordered her favorite cranberry cake and we played cards. I am allergic to cranberries and detest cards. Father was unable to fetch Mary from school, but she sent me a watercolor of the wilderness around Bath as she knew it was my only solace when I was there for school.

At least she had had the good sense not to attempt running away to him! He had visited Sophy in Deal during that shore leave. He would not have been in Plymouth for her to find. He would never have forgiven himself had she come to any harm in her search for him! No wonder she was so desperate to leave, considering the shabby treatment she received at the hands of her family! Had he gone to her when he reached shore, they might have celebrated that birthday together as man and wife!

September 2, 1808

The Laconia set sail today. I suppose I may see this as an end to my hopes. Society forbids me from contacting him myself to make my sentiments known, but he has known my location these two years past. Had he been so inclined, he could have written or even returned: triumphant in his success, able to support a wife and children. We could have been married with my father's consent if not his blessing. As the captain's wife, I could have sailed with him on the Laconia. I've heard the captain's cabins on that class of frigate are rather accommodating. I could have made myself useful in tending to the sick and injured. Frederick did always admire my skills. We could have been together. We could have been happy.

I cannot help but feel that a man's feelings die sooner than a woman's. After all of this time, I still feel his absence as a constant aching hole that I cannot imagine ever filling. Had I the freedom of a man, I would have contacted him to make my sentiments known. I feel that I cannot live without him and yet I do just that. I wake up each morning and go through my day despite the gaping wound in my chest. Had he felt even a fraction of my pain he surely would have returned. Of course, us women are forced into sedentary domestic lives. We have little to do but dwell on past regrets and lost futures. Frederick at least has the benefit of an active profession. He has men that depend on his leadership, King and country depend on the bravery of men like Frederick to protect the rest of us! Surely these responsibilities at least distract him from the hollow pain of lost love.

He thought of her in his cabin on the Laconia, breathing life into the dull space. Walking the deck of the ship with him on his off duty hours, lightening his life. She would be an amazing nurse. Regardless of the unacceptable amount of tears she had shed over him, she never flinched or resorted to hysterics in an emergency. He was unsure he would want to expose his wife to the dangers of battle, but in times of peace he could certainly envision her aboard ship with him.

His fingers again traced the teardrops on the page overlaying her words of agony and he realized that some were fresh – his own tears mingling with hers. Oh my love! At that moment he felt every bit of the pain she described. He dashed the tears from his eyes then his hand fell to rub his battered heart. He gazed unseeing out into the darkness as he contemplated the pain he had caused her. His love had never died, he had merely masked it in implacable resentment and anger. For all of these years he had selfishly thought only of the harm she had done to him in breaking their engagement. As it was
her decision, he had placed the blame for his own suffering on her and never contemplated her own broken heart except to triumph that she had been wrong in doubting him.

“My word Frederick!” Sophy interrupted his revere as she swept into the library, “don't you cut the dashing figure brooding in the window seat after dark, you require only a bolt of lightning and a fair damsel to rescue. Quite out of a Gothic novel!”

He had missed Sophy's gentle teasing. After the death of their parents, Sophy had all but raised him until he joined the Navy. Perhaps what he really needed in all of this was an ally. “Who's to say I wasn't plotting my strategy to rescue my fair damsel, hmm?”

“Oh Frederick, I wish you would be serious!” She chastised him with a fond smile. “I do believe it is time for you to settle down.”

“I couldn't agree with you more.”

The sudden seriousness of his tone drew Sophy's attention. “Really?”

“When the peace swept me to shore with a comfortable fortune and no present occupation I had already decided to take a wife. I resolved that anybody between fifteen and thirty may have me for asking. A little beauty, and a few smiles, and a few compliments to the navy, and I would be a lost man.”

Sophy laughed and responded “Well, we shall have to see what we can do!”

“Of course, that plan has been irrevocably altered”

“What could have made such a drastic change in so little time? You've scarcely been ashore for a fortnight.”

“Coming to this place has stirred some old feelings.” He paused in brooding contemplation. “You know, it was the most outrageous of coincidences that you should lease this house in particular.”

“How so?”

He sighed, debating how much he should tell his sister. Unless national security was at risk, the Admiral was likely to spew out whatever thought entered his mind regardless of the company, but Sophy could be trusted and he was in desperate need of a friendly ear. “I am not sure how much Edward saw fit to divulge to you at the time, but I had formed an attachment when I was last in this county. Our acquaintance was but the span of months, but I fell deeply in love. I proposed and was accepted by my beloved. It was the happiest day of my life.”

“Goodness, why did I never hear of this?”

“You were in the West Indies at the time and within days all of my hopes were dashed. Her father…” he glared at the desk in the corner where Sir Walter had sat during that fateful interview … “and friends opposed the match, they convinced her that it was imprudent, that I did not have the fortune to keep a wife, and she cast me aside. In the course of days I went from the highest elation to the deepest despair. My heart was broken and I wished never to be reminded of it. I couldn't bear to commit the story to writing to inform you.”

Sophy sat beside him and pulled his head to her shoulder, comforting him as she had when he was eight and his parents died in a carriage accident. After several minutes of silence, Sophy seemed to make the connection. “This house...” she began, then thought better of it.
Frederick sighed and explained, “somehow, against my will, unconsciously, I've been in love with Anne Elliot for over eight years.” He said sullenly into her shoulder, then suddenly roused himself and straightened and said with rising animation: “over the last few days I've gained insights into her thoughts and reasons and realized that I was merely angry. I have never in my life met her equal. I saw her again today and realized that I could never love another.”

“So what shall you do?”

“Rescue my fair damsel of course,” he replied with a cheeky grin. “First I must ascertain whether she still loves me, but then it should follow the standard order: I will propose, marry, and live happily ever after!” Frederick returned her a rueful grin, “I may require your assistance.”

“I await my orders Captain!” She said with a salute.

“The Miss Musgroves have also decided that I cut a romantic figure and have latched on to me whenever we are in company. They barged in uninvited to breakfast this morning and made Anne rather uncomfortable. Then they accompanied their brother and I on the hunt – how is one supposed to shoot with a silly girl on each arm I ask you? They leave me little choice but to comply or cut them directly and I do not wish to be rude. From some offhand comments Charles made while shooting today, it appears that the rest of the family considers me the property of one or the other of them as well. I shall need your help running interference.”

“Is it not typically a brother's task to fend off over eager suitors? I suppose as your older sister I must defend your virtue!” Her eyes barely held their mirth at his predicament. “Very well, I shall do my best to keep them at bay, we can't have you ruining your happiness and breaking your heart for the sake of social niceties.”

“Oh, I wouldn't let it come to that. I assure you, I look only for confirmation of Anne's feelings before I commit to her, but I would hate to raise anyone else's expectations farther than I already have by my mere presence alone.”

“Good boy! Now, tell me about your Miss Elliot.”
From this time Captain Wentworth and Anne Elliot were repeatedly in the same circle. This circle was occasionally enlarged by the addition of the Hayters, a family of cousins to the Musgroves with multiple daughters and a son. Charles Hayter – who had a longstanding understanding with Miss Henrietta Musgrove – developed an instant dislike for Frederick. He was brought nearly to the point of despair by Henrietta's obvious infatuation for the dashing Captain. For his part, Frederick tried to set the man's mind at ease, but was never quite successful.

They were soon dining in company together at Mr Musgrove's, for the little boy's state could no longer supply his aunt with a pretense for absenting herself; and this was but the beginning of other dinings and other meetings. Most mornings Sophie and the Admiral spent together outdoors, walking alone together or driving in their gig. Frederick took this time to call at Uppercross and Uppercross cottage – for Anne was just as frequently found at one house as the other. They saw each other nearly daily, but Frederick never found the chance to speak to her alone. He felt her watching him as he conversed with others though he was rarely able to catch her eye.

When talk turned to the Navy, as it often did, he would try to draw her into the conversation. Over the course of their courtship he had taught her well about the workings of a ship, and he was pleased to see that she had obviously continued her studies. Once drawn into the conversation she was animated and well informed. However, a determined sadness crept over her whenever one of the Musgrove girls flirted with him and she lapsed into silence. It seemed almost as if she had decided to give him up to them. As *if my affections could be transferred so easily!*

Frederick was somewhat lost in one of these instances when Mrs. Musgrove sadly brought up Dick Musgrove with an obvious expectation of a response from him. His confusion rapidly gave way to remembrance of a slapdash young midshipman on the Laconia as Louisa whispered “My brother ... mamma is thinking of poor Richard.” He had little of credit to say of the boy, but as Anne was sitting quietly beside Mrs. Musgrove and smiling at him with an amused glint to her eye, he could not help but draw closer. He sat next to Mrs. Musgrove and indulged her remembrances to the best of his ability, all the while conscious of his proximity to Anne.

“Poor dear fellow!” continued Mrs Musgrove; “he was grown so steady, and such an excellent correspondent, while he was under your care! Ah! it would have been a happy thing, if he had never left you. I assure you, Captain Wentworth, we are very sorry he ever left you.”

Frederick silently disagreed with this assessment, but lit on an idea. He caught Sophy's attention and nodded toward the Miss Musgroves. She took them in hand and busied them in searching out the Admiral's ships in the Navy List. “Mrs. Musgrove, do you have Richard's letters at hand? If I could but see them I may be able to expand on what he said.”

Mrs. Musgrove's teary eyes grew wide with excitement. “Oh Captain Wentworth! You are too kind! I shall fetch them directly!” Her eager response made him slightly repentant for the subterfuge, but as she lifted her considerable bulk from the sofa and he found himself looking directly into Anne's eyes he felt only contentment.

He slid closer to her side and said in a low voice, “Miss Anne, I believe you have been avoiding me.”

She looked away and demurred, “of course not Captain, your attention has merely been engaged elsewhere. I am not one to interject myself into another's conversations.”
“Unlike some young ladies I could mention?” He raised his eyebrows and gave a slight gesture in the direction of the Miss Musgroves.

“They are rather spirited.”

“And determined,” he sighed.

Her eyes widened and she stuttered, “but I thought...” Now we are getting somewhere thought Frederick. But before he could elaborate on his feelings, they were interrupted by the Admiral.

"If you had been a week later at Lisbon, last spring, Frederick, you would have been asked to give a passage to Lady Mary Grierson and her daughters."

"Should I? I am glad I was not a week later then."

The Admiral abused him for his want of gallantry and Frederick defended himself: “until recently, I was of the mindset that it is impossible, with all one's efforts, and all one's sacrifices, to make the accommodations on board such as women ought to have. I had therefore maintained that no ship under my command should ever carry ladies for any stretch of time.”

This brought his sister upon him.

"Oh! Frederick! But I cannot believe it of you – All idle refinement! – Women may be as comfortable on board, as in the best house in England. I believe I have lived as much on board as most women, and I know nothing superior to the accommodations of a man-of-war. I declare I have not a comfort or an indulgence about me, even at Kellynch Hall," (with a kind bow to Anne), "beyond what I always had in most of the ships I have lived in; and they have been five altogether.”

Frederick conceded: “You are of course correct Sophy. I have recently come to realize that a worthy steadfast woman with a sweet temper and obliging nature would do very well living aboard ship. When there is a true attachment.” – although this had been spoken to Sophy, his eyes had naturally returned to Anne as he spoke, but he then felt the danger of immediate discovery too near and snapped his eyes back to his sister – “such as your own case, the pain of separation is far worse than the inconveniences of living at sea.” He heard Anne gasp slightly beside him and inwardly rejoiced that she understood his meaning.

Sophy nodded her approval then continued. “Indeed, any reasonable woman may be perfectly happy at sea; and I can safely say, that the happiest part of my life has been spent on board a ship. While we were together, you know, there was nothing to be feared. Thank God! I have always been blessed with excellent health, and no climate disagrees with me. A little disordered always the first twenty-four hours of going to sea, but never knew what sickness was afterwards. The only time I ever really suffered in body or mind, the only time that I ever fancied myself unwell, or had any ideas of danger, was the winter that I passed by myself at Deal, when the Admiral (Captain Croft then) was in the North Seas. I lived in perpetual fright at that time, and had all manner of imaginary complaints from not knowing what to do with myself, or when I should hear from him next; but as long as we could be together, nothing ever ailed me, and I never met with the smallest inconvenience."

"Aye, to be sure. Yes, indeed, oh yes! I am quite of your opinion, Mrs Croft," was Mrs Musgrove's hearty answer as she returned and settled herself on the end of the sofa beside the Captain. "There is nothing so bad as a separation. I am quite of your opinion. I know what it is, for Mr Musgrove always attends the assizes, and I am so glad when they are over, and he is safe back again."

Frederick suppressed a groan at Mrs. Musgrove's interjection. He longed to reach down and grasp Anne's hand but knew he had not the right to do so. He was now aware that nobody understood the
Anne Elliot was a sensible girl. She was accustomed to sitting to the side, forgotten until she could be of use. That is, after all, the role of a spinster aunt. She had long ago resigned herself to that fate. It was growing increasingly hard to remember that fact when she was seated so close to Frederick Wentworth that she could feel the heat of his body. She was still unsure of his motives but she was certain he had done it intentionally. He could have no great interest in reading over Dick Musgrove's letters and sending Mrs. Musgrove off to fetch them was merely a pretense. The intensity of his gaze on her when he slid closer had nearly scorched her. She remembered that look. It was enough to banish that spinster from her mind entirely and return her to the giddy girl of nineteen.

He had implied that the Miss Musgroves's pursuit of him was unwelcome, but she could scarce believe it. Could he really still care for her over the lively beauty of the younger girls? And that conversation about women aboard ships! Her heart skipped at the prospect that he was describing her, repenting that she had not been beside him all of these years. Yet a nagging voice in her mind told her that she had been the one to bring about his initial aversion to the scheme. And surely he could not see her as steadfast, not after she broke off their engagement. Furthermore, he had only recently acclimated himself to the idea of women on board – after meeting the Miss Musgroves? They were, at the moment, all atwitter about the prospect of life at sea.

Her heart broke when the discussion turned to separation. She had suffered eight years of the same worry and torment as a Navy wife but without the legitimate claims of a wife. She had neither the comfort of letters from her husband nor the ability to discuss her lament with her friends. She had suffered her agony in silence. And even now – when her beloved was but a scant few inches away – were they not as far apart as ever? There had been a time, when 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.

Sitting silently beside him while he continued his subdued conversation with Mrs. Musgrove was such sweet torture. She had not thought to ever be this close to him again, to bask in his presence. But she knew it was of little use to hope for their future together. As if to confirm her loss, the Miss Musgroves approached the couch and proposed that they close the evening with dancing. Without waiting for an invitation to dance from the gentleman, Louisa grabbed his hand in a proprietary way and pulled him from the sofa. Anne, of course, offered her services at the piano. The girls no longer even asked if she'd be willing to play, it was expected. Even though her eyes would sometimes fill with tears as she sat at the instrument, she was extremely glad to be employed, and desired nothing in return but to be unobserved.

Her fingers were mechanically at work, proceeding for half an hour together, equally without error, and without consciousness. Once she felt that he was looking at herself, observing her altered features, perhaps, trying to trace in them the ruins of the face which had once charmed him; and once she knew that he must have spoken of her; she was hardly aware of it, till she heard the answer; but then she was sure of his having asked his partner whether Miss Elliot never danced? The answer was, "Oh, no; never; she has quite given up dancing. She had rather play. She is never tired of playing."
Frederick began the dancing in good spirits. He had talked to Anne as privately as could be expected in a crowded drawing room. He had made it as clear as was possible that he wished nothing more than for her to be by his side for the rest of his days. He had gloried in her presence at his side and he was certain that it was only a matter of time before they reached a proper understanding. This was also the first time he had heard her play since their reunion. The Musgroves, being attentive, doting parents, had frequently requested that the Miss Musgroves play in the evenings when he was present. They were, of course, blinded by their partiality to the deficiencies in their daughters' playing. Anne's playing, by contrast was far superior, her technique and skill were flawless. Although he noticed that her playing seemed less vibrant than he recalled. He looked at her and realized with alarm that she was near tears.

He could not bear the sight of her lovely face clouded with sadness. It pierced him to know that he had caused her tears. He strove for an indifferent tone when he asked “does not Miss Elliot dance?” His partner, one of the Miss Hayters, laughingly insinuated that she was past the age for dancing and could play for hours. His anger only increased: anger at the selfish young ladies who were content to dance while Anne sat there mindlessly playing trite dance music; anger at her family for their neglect; anger at Lady Russell for thinking that this hollow life was preferable to life as his wife; but most of all anger at himself for causing her grief, for not fighting harder for her in the year six, for not returning for her in the year eight, for burying his feelings so deeply when hers remained an exposed raw nerve.

At the next break between songs, he sought out Sophy and elicited her help. Anne had gone off on some minor errand for her sister – they treated his Anne as if she were an unpaid companion! – so Sophy and he lingered by the pianoforte. As they waited he noticed them, fresh tears atop the keys. He trailed over them with his fingers as he had done with the tear stains in her diary, but now they were absorbed by his gloves. He wished he could absorb her pain as easily.

She started as she approached the pianoforte and saw him there. Sophy, noting his distraction, began, “My dear Miss Anne, it has been such an age since I've had the pleasure of playing in company, would you indulge me and allow me to exhibit?”

“Of course Mrs. Croft, I suppose one cannot expect to keep an instrument at sea.”

“On the man-of-war you do occasionally have such luxuries, but it is not common. Although we Navy wives are happy to make such sacrifices for the men we love.” Anne blushed beautifully and averted her gaze. Sophy continued, “I have enjoyed re-immersing myself in my music at Kellynch, it is such a lovely instrument!”

“Yes, it was my mother's, I am pleased that it has found continued use.” Frederick reveled in her sweet nature. Another woman, another Elliot, would have regretted, if not loathed Sophy for using her mother's instrument. But Anne's voice held no contempt or grudge at turning her home over to the Crofts and her statement rang sincere. She was a remarkable woman.

No longer able to restrain himself, he stepped forward and held out his hand. “Anne,” he spoke in a low voice, noting the surprise and hope in her eyes at his use of her proper name, “now that you are free from the instrument, would you dance with me?”

Anne blinked, slowly processing Frederick's request as a slow smile crossed her face. “Of course,” she paused, blushed, and continued, “Frederick.”
The room bustled about as the other dancers took their places. Frederick stood across from her smiling with a contented gaze. Mrs. Croft began playing a country dance slightly off key. In a moment of relative privacy, Anne asked, “did your sister really have a burning desire to exhibit in front of company?”

Frederick laughed, “perhaps not, but nobody else was willing to play and I wished to dance with you. It is abominable that they are willing to exclude you so readily.”

Anne inwardly rejoiced at Frederick’s evident desire to spend time with her. “I do not mind.” She then was roused by a particularly off note. “Oh dear, I hope she is not uncomfortable on my account.”

“Sophy? Of course not, what she lacks in technique she makes up in gusto. Only a true proficient would note her errors. Besides, observe the Admiral’s response.” Anne saw the Admiral standing behind his wife, gazing on her fondly as he turned the pages. “The man is no great aficionado but Sophy’s music always gives him pleasure.”

“I am glad. I should hate to put her out on my account.”

“Oh Anne, that is just like you, always willing to place everyone else’s comfort above your own.”

“How can I be happy at the expense of others?” As soon as she’d spoken, Frederick’s gaze intensified.

“I have several thoughts regarding your future happiness, but sadly this is neither the time nor place to discuss that.” She beamed at him, could he possibly mean what that implied? He smiled back with a devastating smile, the same smile that had captured her heart all those years past. He was right of course, a crowded parlor was no place for such a conversation so they reluctantly returned to safer topics.
The very next morning, Frederick rode up the lane to Uppercross Cottage with conviction. Last night had convinced him. While she had not directly spoken of her feelings to him, her tears while watching him dance with other young ladies followed by her incandescent smiles during their own dance were enough encouragement to spur his overflowing heart into action. He had nearly stated his intentions right there in the middle of their makeshift dance floor. But this matter required privacy. He had lain awake devising a strategy. Ideally, he would find a way to get her alone in the course of the morning, but failing that, he had a backup plan in place.

He was pleased when he entered the drawing-room of the cottage and found only herself and the little invalid Charles, who was lying on the sofa. The surprise of finding himself almost alone with Anne Elliot, nearly deprived him of his well laid strategy. He almost scooped her up into his arms on the spot before he recalled that it wouldn't do to go kissing a woman in front of her nephew. Instead he contented himself with a heart felt greeting. “Good morning Anne!”

“Good morning Frederick!” Her beaming smile was enticing him closer, but with a contrite quirk of her lips she forestalled him with: "The Miss Musgroves are up stairs with my sister: they will be down in a few moments, I dare say."

He sighed in frustration that soon the silly girls would again latch on to him and resigned himself to indifferent conversation. "I hope the little boy is better."

“Yesterday little Walter took one of Charles' toys from him – an affront that no little boy can let stand – and he chased after him against the instructions of his nurse and the apothecary. ” She had said all of this with a stern face to her charge. "As a result, he is a bit sore today."

“Ah, a matter of honor then!” Her tinkling laughter filled the room and covered him like a blanket of contentment. “Anne, do you suppose you'd be able to join me on a walk today?”

Anne knew from the tone of his voice what he planned. He intended to renew his addresses. Her heart soared and she had to restrain herself from rushing into his arms. “I should love to Frederick … ” she was interrupted by the Child calling her name, recalling her to her duties, “but I fear I cannot leave little Charles unattended today.” Anne was not the type of girl who would shirk her duties because of her own wishes. She took comfort in the belief that Frederick admired that quality in her. She was obliged to kneel down by the sofa, and remain there to satisfy her patient; and thus they continued a few minutes, when she heard Mary and the girls descending the stairs. As they were making their effusive greetings to Captain Wentworth, the younger boy, a remarkable stout, forward child, of two years old, having got the door opened for him by some one without, made his determined appearance among them, and went straight to the sofa to see what was going on, and put in his claim to anything good that might be giving away.

There being nothing to eat, he could only have some play; and as his aunt would not let him tease his sick brother, he began to fasten himself upon her, as she knelt, in such a way that, busy as she was about Charles, she could not shake him off. She spoke to him, ordered, entreated, and insisted in vain. Once she did contrive to push him away, but the boy had the greater pleasure in getting upon her back again directly.

"Walter," said she, "get down this moment. You are extremely troublesome. I am very angry with you."
“Walter,” cried Mary, "why do you not do as you are bid? Do not you hear your aunt speak? Come to me, Walter, come to Mama."

But not a bit did Walter stir.

In another moment, however, she found herself in the state of being released from him; some one was taking him from her, though he had bent down her head so much, that his little sturdy hands were unfastened from around her neck, and he was resolutely borne away, before she knew that Captain Wentworth had done it.

He handed the struggling child to his mother who huffed, "you ought to have minded me, Walter; I told you not to tease your aunt. Do you see, he never minds his own mother! I am so ill used!"

Frederick turned to Anne and held out his hand, “Are you alright?” He asked tenderly as he assisted her to her feet.

“I am well,” she responded breathlessly.

“You are injured.” He reached for her neck and she preceded him by placing her hand over the cut.

“It is merely a scratch, Captain, I am fit for duty,” she quipped with a quirk of her lips.

“Not so fast, if you please, to the sick bay with you.” He ordered with mock solemnity and gestured to a chair at the far side of the room before he turned and reached for Walter. “Now, young sailor, if you see fit to do battle, you must help clean up your messes.”

Mary, always relieved to be relieved of her children, handed Walter over but voiced her objections “Captain Wentworth, is this really necessary? He is but a child.”

“A child who has thrown a tantrum, disobeyed his mother, and drawn blood from his aunt. Is it not better for him to see that his actions have consequences?”

“How clever you are Captain,” giggled Louisa.

“Yes, Mary and Mama always have such trouble minding him, perhaps he needs some military discipline,” added Henrietta.

Anne sat and allowed Frederick, with the dubious aid of Walter, to clean the scrape from the child's fingernails and apply a completely unnecessary plaster to her 'wound'. All the while, Frederick lectured Little Walter on the honor and duty expected of a gentleman, even one in short pants.

While Louisa and Henrietta were occupied calming Mary's nerves over 'her great ordeal' and tending to little Charles, Frederick leaned forward and pressed Anne, “are you sure you cannot walk with me?”

“I am certain you will not make it out the door for a walk with me without Louisa and Henrietta following.” She replied archly.

“No, no that will not suit my purpose at all.” His disappointment was evident on his face, but he rallied as he pulled a small package from his pocket. “This belongs to you Miss Elliot, I thought it prudent to return it. Please note the indicated page.” With eyes of glowing entreaty fixed on her for a time he bid her good day and within a minute had taken his leave of the other ladies and departed alone.

Anne left the children in the other ladies' care and excused herself, ostensibly to repair the damage to
her hair from Walter's siege. Upon gaining her room she examined the package in her hand. It was clearly a book, wrapped in white paper fixed with a ribbon tied in an elaborate sailor's knot. She slipped the ribbon off and unwrapped the paper revealing an oddly familiar green bound book. Opening the cover she realized in horror that it was an old diary of hers that had gone missing! Had Frederick read her diary? With her heart beating rapidly in her ears, she opened it to the indicated page and saw to her horror:

August 15, 1809

Charles Musgrove has proposed...

Oh Dear! What an entry for him to have read! Then she directed her eye to the bold, masculine handwriting on the facing page.

October 29 1814

Dearest Anne, please forgive my great impertinence in reading your inner thoughts. A gentleman ought not invade a lady's privacy in such a way, but I yearned for your feelings and this book has brought me to a better understanding of you, too good, too excellent creature!

I can wait no longer in silence. I must speak to you by such means as are within my reach. 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. I offer myself to you again with a heart even more your own than when you almost broke it, eight years and a half ago. Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has an earlier death. I have loved none but you. Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have been, but never inconstant. You alone have brought me to Uppercross day after day. For you alone, I think and plan. Have you not seen this? Can you fail to have understood my wishes? I had not waited even these ten days, could I have read your feelings, as I think you must have penetrated mine. If you do believe that there is true attachment and constancy among men. Believe it to be most fervent, most undeviating, in F.W.

I have been utterly unable to find a single moment alone with you and so I must go, uncertain of my fate; but I shall wait for you in the same location I posed this same question to you all those years ago. A word, a look, will be enough to decide my future happiness.

She sat for half an hour in solitude and reflection in order to regain her tranquility from the overpowering happiness elicited by his note. She roused herself to check in the looking glass and found her hair indeed was quite ruined from her earlier ordeal. She quickly righted it, having the last minute thought to incorporate Frederick's ribbon into her hair. Returning to the drawing room she informed the ladies that she had developed a headache and would go on a walk to clear her head in the fresh air. When the Miss Musgroves – already bored with the tedious tasks of childcare and attending to Mary's nerves – offered to accompany her, she begged that solitude and quiet were all she required to be set to rights.
After some protest from the Miss Musgroves and lamentations from Mary about her ill usage, Anne finally escaped alone. She set off for the grove of trees near the Monksford parsonage in better spirits and looks than she had even on that fateful summer long ago. That young girl had known little of suffering and nothing of true, lasting heartbreak. The joy of mutual affection and understanding in an untested love had been immense, but it paled to the utter bliss of the reconciliation of love that had survived battered and bruised through hardships. She was not yet half way to their sanctuary when she saw a lone figure on horseback ahead and smiled radiantly.

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Frederick had gone immediately to their secret hideaway where they had spent hours in blissful contentment that perfect summer together; where he had issued his first proposal; where he had kissed her for the first time; where they had discussed the abstract glory of their happy future. It was the ideal location to renew their engagement. However, after only minutes of happy reflections, he found the flaw in his plan. Monkford was a good two and a half miles from Uppercross cottage midway between Uppercross and Kellynch. On horseback he had traversed it with ease, but Anne was on foot and would take quite some time to arrive. He calculated that she could not possibly arrive for another hour, possibly longer depending on how quickly she could extricate herself from her sister, but all the while he was hoping for her sooner. As he paced the grove he grew more and more impatient. He was fairly certain of his reception after their conversation this morning, but he could not stand this wait!

He re-mounted his horse and began his journey back to Anne, eager to see her, to hear her say that she loved him and would spend the rest of her life with him. Growing nervous, he drew his horse to a stop before he was within sight of the Great House. What if the Miss Musgroves saw him and latched on? What if Charles was out shooting? He doubted he could attend to anyone other than Anne in this state. So it was that the dashing, decisive, and active Captain Wentworth found himself pacing his horse along a deserted stretch of dreary road between Uppercross and Monkford fretting.

He was pacing away from Uppercross when he finally heard her call, “Be careful sir, you appear to be missing a very important appointment!”

He reeled around – a maneuver his beleaguered horse objected to greatly – and saw her glowing cheeks and radiant smile as he quickly approached her. “I found a flaw in my romantic plan to meet in our special spot.” As there was no audience or public view to reign in their dancing spirits and rapture, he swept off of his horse and caught her up in his arms spinning them in a circle, “I could not wait!”

She giggled and slipped her arms around his neck, “I’m glad of it, it is a frightfully long walk.”

“Anne, I love you. Will you marry me?”

“Yes!” She barely got the word out before he pulled her in for a kiss that held eight long years of pent up passion and longing.

“Frederick!” She gasped when they finally separated, “perhaps we should get off of the road, anyone might find us!”

“Always practical my dear,” he sighed, kissed her forehead, then lifted her onto his horse and swung up behind her.
“I’m not sure sharing a horse is much more proper dearest.” She laughingly chided.

“Scandalous, no doubt,” he said as he kissed her nape, “why, if anyone were to come across us you would be forced to marry me with all due haste!”

“I believe eight years is a long enough interval as it is between a proposal and a wedding that nobody could consider it hasty. And remember, you do already have my father’s consent.”

“And you are of age.”

“And we have one independent fortune between us.”

“Good heavens, I am tempted to make for Gretna Green straight away.”

“Frederick dearest, I love you, but Gretna Green is out of the question.” Here he abruptly stopped the horse and pulled her closer.

“Please say it again.”

“Riding to Graetna Green on one horse is impractical?”

“Not that part!”

“Oh!” She twisted as best she could to face him and repeated, “Dearest Frederick, I have loved you for nearly a third of my life, a life which was incomplete without you.” He pulled her close and kissed her soundly. When her mouth was again free, she said: “I would have said that earlier but you didn’t allow me to say more than ‘yes’.”

“I felt that actions spoke louder than words, and yet hearing the words proved just as powerful.” He gently resumed their journey and they continued in contented silence until they reached the grove – where the power of conversation would make the present hour a blessing indeed, and prepare it for all the immortality which the happiest recollections of their own future lives could bestow. There they exchanged again those feelings and those promises which had once before seemed to secure everything, but which had been followed by so many, many years of division and estrangement. There they 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.

After the requisite time spent discussing and expressing the feelings of each, Anne turned to more practical questions. “And how did you come into possession of my diary sir?”

Frederick grinned at her sheepishly, “I was sitting in the window seat in the library at Kellynch, haunted by the vision of your tear-streaked face as you broke our engagement and with it my heart, when I spied a speck of green behind the bookshelf. Desperately trying to distract myself from my memories, I set to fishing it out. You can imagine my shock when I discovered that my chosen diversion, rather than distracting me from you, turned out to contain your innermost thoughts. When we first met and fell in love, I believed that I understood you better than I’d ever understood another human being. But after you cut me I felt perplexed and betrayed as if I’d never really known you at all. I apologize for intruding on your privacy in such a way, but I couldn't resist the chance at an insight into your mind.”

“I admit I find it hard to reproach you for it if it brought about our renewed understanding.”

“That first night it served only to torment me. I read only the final entry which revealed that Charles Musgrove had proposed, you were unsure of your decision, and that you still loved me. I had barely
time to process this information before Admiral Croft informed me that we were engaged for dinner with the Musgroves, where I would meet the heir, Charles and his wife … formerly Miss Elliot. I was stricken. As soon as I came to understand your feelings and my own I discovered that you were married and forever out of my reach.”

“You thought I married Charles!”

“You may have noticed that the Admiral has some difficulty with ladies names, so he could enlighten me no further. As I knew that the man had proposed to you it was not too great an assumption to think you had accepted. And so I steeled myself against the pain of meeting you in the company of your husband. I fear I made a fool of myself when I was introduced to Mrs. Charles Musgrove and in my relief I was less guarded in my response than I would have wished.”

“Mary did inform me – with a suggestive tone – that you were very attentive to her,” Anne laughed.

“I smiled like a besotted fool, I believe. But that joy was diminished when I found you were not a quarter mile away and yet avoided the dinner. Your sister downplayed the child's injury and I suspected that you were avoiding me.”

“Little Charles really did need my care, though perhaps I was relieved by the delay in our reunion. I didn't know how to meet you as a common and indifferent acquaintance and I was unsure how you would act or feel.”

“My own concerns exactly! I knew that you had loved me at two and twenty, and apparently turned down an eligible match because of it, but that did not ensure that you loved me still. Meeting you the following morning, discerning that you had not altered, that you were as lovely and intelligent as I remembered, enjoying your smiles, was a sweet torture. You were polite but reserved and I could not tell your feelings.”

“I could say the same of you Frederick. I was not prepared for your easy camaraderie, and yet your conversation, your complements, were all on general matters that implied friendship rather than deeper feelings. Perhaps if you had called me lovely then…”

“I could hardly be more open in front of your sister and brother-in-law! And that fool had to go and add to every complement I gave you!”

“You can't be jealous of Charles! He's my brother!”

“Can't I? He's your brother-in-law, who had a long-standing attachment to you and married your younger sister only after you refused his offer of marriage,” he rationalized sulkily. Then taking her hand added, “a man does not recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman. He ought not; he does not. I can assure you from personal experience that you are a hard woman to forget Anne Elliot.”

Anne leaned forward and kissed him gently. “You have nothing to fear from Charles. His attachment to me was more puppy love. He liked to follow me around, fetch me punch and the like. I in turn would praise him when he did the right thing, scold him when he was wrong. He and I are of an age, and his sense is perhaps a bit weak, so it was inevitable that he would admire me. But shortly after I refused him Mary returned from school grown up and polished and far more apt to return his adoration. He gladly transferred his affections and married her. They are mostly happy together. He would never jeopardize that and you must know I would never …”

“Of course I knew you would never dally with your sister's husband! But jealously is not rational.”
“Ah yes, I believe my share of jealousy outweighed yours two to one by the end of that meal.”

“Ah, the determined Miss Musgroves,” he said in a jovial manner.

“You may make light of it now, but I was quite miserable at the time. You were seated with two beautiful, young, lively girls on either side of you, giving you their rapt attention. I am well aware that my beauty at seven and twenty cannot compete with that of Louisa Musgrove at seven and ten.”

“Stuff and Nonsense!” He interrupted her, “you are every bit as beautiful and enchanting now as you were eight years ago and I will not hear a word against it.”

“I am glad you think so, even if I cannot be of the same mind,” at his scowl she hurried on, “even so, the Miss Musgroves were not as indifferent to your appearance as you were to theirs, and the whole family was certain you would marry one of them, I've heard of little else for the last week and a half.”

“Even had I maintained my wounded pride and resisted my love for you, I believe I could never care for either of them. Through all of the years of my resentment I never found a woman I thought your equal. As for the Miss Musgroves, their silliness could ill bear a comparison for your perfect excellence of the mind or the perfect unrivalled hold it possessed over my own. I am well able to distinguish between the steadiness of principle and the obstinacy of self-will, between the darings of heedlessness and the resolution of a collected mind. You see, my heart was well guarded against the flattery of a pair of flirtatious girls.”

“They shall be disappointed, but I daresay they are young enough to survive the shock. We will eventually have to leave this grove and face them.”

Frederick sighed dramatically and pulled her closer, “and you're certain against Gretna Green?”

She laughed, “You know I do not aspire to a grand society wedding, but I would like my family and Lady Russell present.”

His arms tightened around her even as he stiffened, “I will concede only as long as we do not give them enough time to persuade you against it. I cannot loose you again.”

"You need not fear on that account, nothing could induce me to break our engagement again. However, I have been thinking over the past, and trying impartially to judge of the right and wrong, I mean with regard to myself; and I must believe that I was right, much as I suffered from it, that I was perfectly right in being guided by the friend whom you will love better than you do now. To me, she was in the place of a parent. Do not mistake me, however. I am not saying that she did not err in her advice. It was, perhaps, one of those cases in which advice is good or bad only as the event decides; and for myself, I certainly never should, in any circumstance of tolerable similarity, give such advice. But I mean, that 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."

“After reading your rationale in your diary – in far greater detail than I allowed you to say before I stormed away – I must admit both you and that Lady were correct in some regards. We hadn't discussed where you would live. I would never have trusted the Asp with your life.”

“When your brother told me of the condition of the ship it broke my heart. Mr. Wentworth strongly suggested, and I did not disagree, that I had pushed you to take the first option offered regardless of
the risks."

“I do not know that I would have accepted the commission had I a wife to provide for, a life to look forward to. I walked on to that derelict a man with nothing to lose and it made my career. When you claimed that you released me for the sake of my career I thought it a mere ploy by Lady Russell to play into your obliging nature, but now I do see some merit in the claim.”

“I never would have given you up for my benefit alone. Had there been a way to ease your suffering I would have done it at whatever cost to myself.” Frederick, roused by her tender hearted compassion, could not resist bending his head to hers and kissing her again.

After several minutes of such ministrations, Frederick broached another of his failures. “Your diary has led me to question whether there may not have been one person more my enemy even than Lady Russell? My own self. Tell me if, when I returned to England in the year eight, with a few thousand pounds, and was posted into the Laconia, if I had then written to you, would you have answered my letter? Would you, in short, have renewed the engagement then?”

"Would I!" was all her answer; but the accent was decisive enough.

“The sentiments in your diary from the year eight suggested as much. It is not that I did not think of it, or desire it, as what could alone crown all my other success; but I was proud, too proud to ask again. I did not understand you. I shut my eyes, and would not understand you, or do you justice. This is a recollection which ought to make me forgive every one sooner than myself. Six years of separation and suffering might have been spared.”

“Do not dwell on the suffering of the past, my love. Let us look instead to the future.”

“Indeed,” he responded with a smile. "I must endeavor to subdue my mind to my fortune. I must learn to brook being happier than I deserve."

After a period of breathless distraction, the ever practical Anne sighed. “We ought to return, my absence will be noted.”

“I suppose we must.” He reluctantly rose and lifted her onto the horse. “We may console ourselves by announcing our engagement.”

They had progressed only a quarter of a mile – plodding at the speed one might expect of lovers who were reluctant to reach their destination and end their solitude – when they were overtaken by a gig which pulled to a stop just before them. “Oh Frederick!” Sophy exclaimed, with an appraising look in her eye, “we thought we might come across you if we came this way.”

“Is anything the matter Miss Elliot? Sprained your ankle?” Inquired Admiral Croft, eying their unusual positions. “We might take you in the gig to your sisters in that case.”

“No Admiral, nothing at all is the matter, in fact it is all wonderfully, perfectly right.” Frederick beamed at his betrothed then turned to his sister and brother-in-law. “Anne has agreed to be my wife!”

The Admiral appeared ready to make an uncouth statement in his confusion, but his wife stayed him with a hand on his arm and said, “Oh Frederick! Anne! Congratulations! Welcome to the family my dear. Everyone calls my husband Admiral – I doubt Frederick even knows his Christian name – but you must call me Sophy!”

“Thank you Sophy, Admiral! You are the first to share our joy, we are on our way to Uppercross Cottage now to tell my sister, will you join us?”
“Capital idea!” replied the Admiral.

“Frederick, I had better move to the gig.” Anne said reluctantly.

Unwilling to give up the contact, Frederick held fast. “Do you consult your own wishes or cater only to propriety? Would you be more comfortable in the gig?”

“Of course not, but we are in a rather scandalous position.”

“You must learn to put your own desires first on occasion, my dear. And besides, remember the benefits of scandal, you may be required to marry me in haste,” he said with a suggestive wiggle of his eyebrow.

The Admiral laughed, “just the kind of courtship I approve of, Sophy and I were married within days of meeting and have been happier for it. Come along then.” At that he started the gig leaving Anne and Frederick to trot alongside.
Return to Uppercross Cottage, October 29 1814

Louisa Musgrove was bored. Anne had left for her walk nearly two hours ago and Mary insisted on her and Henrietta remaining to help tend the boys. Mary persisted in her nervous complaint from the ‘trials’ of the morning and therefore was unable to see to an invalid and an active two year old herself. “What would happen were little Walter to latch on to me in such a manner, while I’m in such a delicate state and no dashing Captain to rescue me! And here is Anne gone off and left me to fend for myself, you simply must stay.”

Henrietta, always obliging, had readily agreed, cajoling Louisa into her own agreement. They had supposed she would take but a brief walk, but now time seemed to drone on. And so Henrietta was quietly reading Robinson Crusoe to little Charles, Mary was sleeping – or at least pretending to sleep in order to keep up the pretense of her indisposition, it was sometimes hard to tell – and Louisa was at the table drawing with little Walter. At least she had the benefit of a window to look out of. She would much rather be out walking, or reading a novel, or practicing the harp or pianoforte, or any of a dozen other things more interesting than watching a two year old scribble on paper and praising his talents. Anne was far better suited to nursing and childcare than Henrietta and she were. Although she must admit that Walter had calmed down significantly since his chat with Captain Wentworth this morning.

_Captain Wentworth_. What an ideal example of everything a gentleman ought to be. In addition to his handsome features, imposing build, illustrious career, charm, and ease of manner, she could now add good with children to the list. She wouldn't credit herself with being in love with him after so short an acquaintance, but she could be with only the slightest provocation from the gentleman. She was determined to have him. Her parents doted on her, but they rarely left Uppercross so she was unlikely to meet with a better suitor. Of course, it was somewhat uncomfortable being in competition with her dearest sister and closest friend, but she knew that Henrietta was in love with Charles Hayter and would remember that as soon as the novelty of Captain Wentworth wore off. Perhaps when Anne returned, she should persuade Henrietta into a walk to Winthrop to visit him.

She looked up at the sound of wheels crunching on gravel and saw the Admiral and Mrs. Croft, and if the bobbing top-hat she saw behind the gig was any indication, Captain Wentworth had returned as well! She was about to inform Mary and Henrietta of the visitors when the Captain rode into sight and she caught her breath. “Good Heavens!” _Is that Anne? Is she injured?_ No, she was definitely smiling, maybe even glowing!

“Who is it Louisa?”

“The Crofts with Captain Wentworth and Anne,” Louisa murmured, attempting to parse the image before her as Mary straightened herself from the guise of invalid into the guise of gracious hostess and Henrietta attempted to keep little Charles from straining off of the sofa in the excitement. She watched as Captain Wentworth dismounted and gently lifted Anne off of the horse. His hands lingered at her waist as he settled her on the ground, closer to him than strictly proper. They gazed soulfully into each other’s eyes and smiled. _Captain Wentworth and Anne Elliot_. And in that moment she knew that all of her plans were for naught. Anne slipped her hand in the crook of Captain Wentworth’s arm and he lovingly covered it with his own as they moved for the door.

Louisa was grateful that she had the advantage of at least these few moments to school her emotions. She was disappointed, but it would never do to let that show. She loved Anne, and the pair were obviously in love. She couldn’t begrudge Anne love simply because she admired the same man. At seven and twenty, lord knows that Anne will never have another chance at it.
The newcomers entered the house and Anne beamed as she made her announcement. Louisa had never truly looked at Anne, she was always meekly unobtrusive and obliging. Had she always been this beautiful, or was that the effect of Captain Wentworth's attentions? Mary shrieked her astonishment, followed by obsequious complements to the couple and an insufferable comment regarding showing her precedence by telling her first before going up to the great house. The Admiral and Mrs. Croft shared an amused glance at each other at Mary's convenient manner of forgetting that they had been told first. Henrietta seemed to overcome her own attachment to the Captain quickly enough to wish them joy with a heartfelt smile.

The commotion drew Charles's attention and he was quickly apprised of the news as he entered the room. He appeared rather flustered and gave his congratulations cautiously before looking at Louisa. As the whole room looked at her she realized she had yet to respond. Louisa looked at Anne and gave her the most sincere smile she could muster – she was not yet equal to looking at Captain Wentworth with equanimity. “I am so happy for you, but this is all so sudden!”

“Not sudden at all Miss Louisa,” said Captain Wentworth, drawing her attention to to him, “We have a longstanding attachment.” Louisa gasped, *he has been in love with Ann this whole time! I've never really had a chance.*

“We first fell in love over eight years ago …” Louisa stifled a grin as she saw Charles making some mental calculations with a frown. Poor Charles had never had a chance six years ago either. As Anne and the Captain jointly told the story of their history Louisa listened first with incredulity, followed by sadness and finally rapt interest. It was such a story to touch all of the tender feelings of a romantic young girl. She certainly hoped she would not have to wait until she was an old maid before reaching her happily ever after, but she now longed for her own tragic hero, brooding away for lost love. Perhaps Captain Wentworth would be able to introduce her to other dashing young officers.

The revelations of the morning had put her in an uncharacteristically reflective mood, so she surprised everyone by offering to tend to Little Charles while the others proceeded up to the Great House to share the news. While she could never stand in the way of the previously star crossed lovers, Captain Wentworth could not fail to remain her ideal gentleman and she suddenly was struck by his descriptions of Anne's merits. Of course, he mentioned her beauty, but he primarily extolled her mind, her understanding, her compassion, her skills as a nurse and caregiver. Many of the same traits which Louisa herself had spent her morning bemoaning. Why, this was the first time she had willingly helped with little Charles's care in the week and a half since his fall. She was his aunt as well, and yet she had not questioned that Anne would be his nurse while she and Henrietta continued their happy pursuits. She realized how ill equipped she was to attract a man such as Captain Wentworth and decided a new regime was in order. Perhaps Anne would help her compile a reading list.
In spite of every wish for haste between the two lovers, they were obliged to wait until December to wed. The initial plan was to wait until Lady Russell's return to Kellynch Lodge and marry from Kellynch. They were swiftly informed, however, that it would be a degradation for Sir Walter and Elizabeth to return to Kellynch without the comforts of their own home. No manner of persuasion or warm invitations from the Crofts could induce them home under such embarrassing circumstances. The solution came from an unexpected champion.

When she received Anne's news via post, Lady Russell was inclined to look far more favorably on the match than she had in the past. Back then, Captain Wentworth's manners had not suited her own ideas, so she had been too quick in suspecting them to indicate a character of dangerous impetuosity. However, Captain Wentworth's continued regard for Anne was a mark in his favor. He had succeeded in his profession and was quite rich and therefore able to support a wife and children – indeed far more capable of supporting Anne than her spendthrift father. She was also conscious of Anne's advancing age and diminishing prospects. In the year six, she had assumed that Anne's youthful infatuation with the dashing Captain would pass once she was introduced to a broader society but in eight years it had not abated. Any hopes Lady Russell had of a more illustrious match for Anne had long since faded into a desire only to see her god daughter happy. Anne had not had a serious suitor since Charles Musgrove, and had shown at that juncture that she was disinclined to heed to persuasion towards a marriage of convenience. And so, determined that this marriage was Anne's best chance at happiness, Lady Russell had become their staunchest defender against the coldness and incivility of Sir Walter and Elizabeth. When she learned of his objections, she wrote to Anne proposing that upon her return to the Lodge, she remain only for a week to recover from her journey before she and Anne travel to Bath where the wedding could take place with no embarrassment to Sir Walter.

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Frederick consoled himself for their prolonged engagement with daily visits to Uppercross to bask in Anne's presence. Any resentment or awkwardness that may have resulted from the shock of the engagement in certain members of their circle were soon overcome in the face of the obvious love and affection between the couple. They were overall a merry party, even if they were a bit constrained by forced idleness and the anticipation of a long awaited event. In November, a letter from Captain Wentworth's friend Captain Harville suggested a diversion from this tedium. It brought intelligence of Captain Harville's being settled with his family at Lyme for the winter; of their being therefore, quite unknowingly, within twenty miles of each other. Captain Harville had never been in good health since a severe wound which he received two years before, and Captain Wentworth's anxiety to see him had determined him to go immediately to Lyme. Unwilling to part from his betrothed for even a day or two, Captain Wentworth proposed an excursion and therefore to Lyme they were to go – Charles, Mary, Anne, Henrietta, Louisa, and Captain Wentworth.

It was overall an uneventful trip. Their primary goal, of course, was meeting Captain Wentworth's closest friends Captain and Mrs Harville, and a Captain Benwick, who was staying with them. Through the fraternity of the navy on the one side and the marital connections and affection on the other, the whole party treated each other quite as family from the first introductions. The party from Uppercross felt the joys of walking along the Cobb and enjoying the sea air. If a young gentleman walking along the Cobb gazed appraisingly at Anne, she and her fiancé were far too engrossed in conversation with each other to pay him any heed.

Louisa's high spirits and impetuosity were greatly subdued by the shock of Captain Wentworth's
engagement and her subsequent self reflection and attempts at self-improvement. She remained an energetic and happy girl, but she had somehow matured in the preceding weeks and developed a greater reserve.

Captain Benwick had some time ago been first lieutenant of the Laconia; and the account which Captain Wentworth had given of him, on his return from Lyme before, his warm praise of him as an excellent young man and an officer, whom he had always valued highly, which must have stamped him well in the esteem of every listener, had been followed by a little history of his private life, which rendered him perfectly interesting in the eyes of all the ladies. He had been engaged to Captain Harville's sister, and was now mourning her loss. They had been a year or two waiting for fortune and promotion. Fortune came, his prize-money as lieutenant being great; promotion, too, came at last; but Fanny Harville did not live to know it. She had died the preceding summer while he was at sea. Captain Wentworth believed it impossible for man to be more attached to woman than poor Benwick had been to Fanny Harville, or to be more deeply afflicted under the dreadful change. He considered his disposition as of the sort which must suffer heavily, uniting very strong feelings with quiet, serious, and retiring manners, and a decided taste for reading, and sedentary pursuits.

To Louisa Musgrove, who had so recently grown more introspective herself, he was a particularly romantic figure. He shared many of those qualities she had admired in Captain Wentworth and had the added romance of a long separation culminating in a tragic end. His naval brothers looked on him as quite inconsolable and doomed to forever mourn the loss of his beloved. Louisa, whose high spirits and optimistic nature could never be fully repressed, did not take such a dire view of the matter. He had loved deeply and suffered a great loss, and yet she felt such a tragic hero all the more worthy of the solace of a happily ever after.

Louisa had newly gained a heightened interest in poetry – influenced by Anne's tutelage and her own wish to broaden her mind – and upon discovering that he was evidently a young man of considerable taste in reading, though principally in poetry she engaged him in a discussion. She had the hope of being of real use to him in some suggestions as to the duty and benefit of struggling against affliction, which had naturally grown out of their conversation. For, though shy, he did not seem reserved; it had rather the appearance of feelings glad to burst their usual restraints; and having talked of poetry, the richness of the present age, he repeated, with such tremulous feeling, the various lines which imaged a broken heart, or a mind destroyed by wretchedness, and looked so entirely as if he meant to be understood, that she ventured to hope he did not always read only poetry, and to say, that she thought it was the misfortune of poetry to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely; and that the strong feelings which alone could estimate it truly were the very feelings which ought to taste it but sparingly.

His looks shewing him not pained, but pleased with this allusion to his situation, she was emboldened to go on, she ventured to recommend a larger allowance of prose in his daily study. On being requested to particularize, Louisa lost her footing and blushingly admitted her own deficiencies on the subject, but added that they both might benefit from such an occupation. They discretely applied to Anne for her own superior knowledge on the subject and were recommended such works of our best moralists, such collections of the finest letters, such memoirs of characters of worth and suffering, as occurred to her at the moment as calculated to rouse and fortify the mind by the highest precepts, and the strongest examples of moral and religious endurances.

Captain Benwick listened attentively, and seemed grateful for the interest implied; and though with a shake of the head, and sighs which declared his little faith in the efficacy of any books on grief like his, noted down the names of those she recommended, and promised to procure and read them. Louisa ventured to boldly suggest with a sweet smile, “Perhaps, Captain Benwick, we could select a few titles from the list to read and discuss them together when we meet again in Bath for the wedding.” He stared at her with a stunned look and she added, “I have always found that improving
reading is far more pleasant when shared with the company of others. Perhaps we may help each other."

For the first time in their acquaintance, his gloom broke far enough to allow a small rueful smile and he said quietly, “I think I would like that Miss Musgrove.”

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The second week of December brought the return of Lady Russell to Kellynch Lodge, and Anne returned to stay with her until they departed for Bath. Over the course of the week, Lady Russell had daily opportunities to see the lovers together and any lingering reservations she had were smoothed away by their doting smiles and solicitous behavior towards one another. She went to some pains to make herself agreeable to Captain Wentworth. This proved a difficult undertaking as she refused to apologize for the advice which had separated the lovers and he refused to accept that she had given that advice with all possible good will. By the end of the week, however, they were able to bear each other's company with tolerable civility and had hopes of reconciling for Anne's sake before too long.

Frederick lamented the folly of four carriages transporting eleven people to Bath for the wedding in order to placate the pretensions of only two – especially as Anne particularly detested Bath in the first place. He had scarcely begun to admonish Anne about her tendency to place the wishes of others before her own when she gently interrupted him.

“Frederick my love, I have few desires for my wedding: you smiling at the altar, my father giving me away, and our family and friends present, it does not much matter to me if it happens in Kellynch or Bath. Besides, Lady Russell would have gone to Bath regardless in a few weeks, the Crofts have been recommended to visit Bath because of the Admiral's gout, and the Miss Musgroves have been pleading with their parents for a trip to Bath for years. It may be an inconvenience, to some of us, but it is one I am willing to live with if it gains my father's cooperation.”

Frederick had little defense against her reasoning other than a wish to blame Sir Walter and Elizabeth. Although Lady Russell had made her amends, he could not forget Sir Walter's previous behavior and the cold letters they had received from him and his eldest daughter did nothing to improve Frederick's opinion. And so, with some grumbling and a great deal of anticipation, the bride and groom and their guests started out for Bath. Lady Russel put Anne down at her father's home in Camden Place – where her sister Elizabeth and her companion Mrs. Clay were also in residence – before settling in her own lodgings in Rivers Street. Mary was very much put out that her father and Elizabeth did not offer her and Charles a room at in Camden place and she was therefore obliged to put up at the White Hart with the Musgroves. The the Crofts took lodgings in Gay Street which were barely large enough to accommodate their guests: Frederick, Captain and Mrs. Harville, Captain Benwick, and Mr. and Mrs. Edward Wentworth who journeyed down from Shropshire for the event. While they all fit, it was fortuitous that most of the guests were sailors and accustomed to tight quarters.

Although entirely unknown to the bride and groom before, Anne's cousin, Mr. Elliot was also in attendance at the wedding. He had only just arrived but his first object on arriving, had been to leave his card in Camden Place, following it up by such assiduous endeavors to meet, and when they did meet, by such great openness of conduct, such readiness to apologize for the past, such solicitude to be received as a relation again, that their former good understanding was completely re-established. As it was, Sir Walter found it a credit to their family to have his heir present at Anne's wedding. Mr. Elliot made an effort to be everything charming to his relations, but silently cursed the fact that he had not met the lovely Miss Anne until after her betrothal.

Elizabeth, as she was the mistress of Sir Walter's household, had planned the whole wedding and
breakfast. Had she attended merely as a guest, she would have thought it all extremely shabby, and very inferior to the grand affair her own wedding would be – *Very little white satin, very few lace veils; a most pitiful business!* But as it was just Anne, and as they had to make economies where they could, she was rather pleased with the event in the end.

Anne and Frederick, however, found no fault with the wedding. They were finally man and wife and nothing could damper their happiness. Indeed there was little to distress them beyond the want of graciousness and warmth. Sir Walter made no objection, and Elizabeth did nothing worse than look cold and unconcerned. Sir Walter, indeed, though he had no affection for Anne, and no vanity flattered, to make him really happy on the occasion, was very far from thinking it a bad match for her. On the contrary, when he saw more of Captain Wentworth, saw him repeatedly by daylight, and eyed him well, he was very much struck by his personal claims, and felt that his superiority of appearance might be not unfairly balanced against her superiority of rank; and all this, assisted by his well-sounding name, enabled Sir Walter at last to prepare his pen, with a very good grace, for the insertion of the marriage in the volume of honor.

Anne and Frederick remained at the wedding breakfast only as long as propriety dictated they must. They journeyed back to Kellynch that day. The Crofts had decided to make a stay of two months in Bath to ease the Admiral's gout. Therefore Captain and Mrs. Wentworth looked forward to returning to a blessedly empty house. However, when they arrived they were warmly greeted and congratulated by old family retainers who all held Anne in the highest esteem. They were then subjected to an extravagant dinner of six removes that a well meaning Sophy had ordered for them. When the footmen finally cleared the desert, Frederick impatiently scooped Anne up – *servants be damned* – and carried her up to his room.

“Frederick!” Anne exclaimed with an impish smile as they crossed the doorway, “were you aware that this was my bedroom?”

“I doubt I would have been able to sleep these last months if I had been,” he replied, his eyes growing darker with desire as he set her down without releasing her from his embrace. “However, as fate seems to have been toiling particularly hard these past months to see us united, such coincidences no longer surprise me.”

“It does seem fitting. It was my bedroom, then your bedroom, and now it is our bedroom,” Anne smiled sweetly drawing Frederick's head down for a kiss.

When they finally separated, Frederick rested his forehead on Anne's. “It is a period, indeed!” He said introspectively. “Eight years and a half is a period. I can scarce believe that after all of those lonely years you are here in my arms. My wife!”

“And do you not think that was long enough of a wait?” She replied with a blush as she slowly began unbuttoning her gown. Frederick fervently agreed and directed his full attention to his wife. He wasted no further time that evening on remembrances of the past.

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Six months after Anne's marriage, Elizabeth Elliot had the great satisfaction of planning another wedding. This time, however, economy played no role in the preparations. Only the finest materials, most elegant modiste, and most extravagant foods could be expected to usher in the marriage of the eldest daughter of Sir Walter Elliot to his heir William Walter Elliot. Her charming husband even suggested that for her comfort, Mrs. Clay ought to continue as her companion. He was so attentive to her needs. The Crofts gladly gave over their lease to Mr. Elliot whose large fortune – acquired
through his deceased wife – allowed him to take possession of Kellynch before his inheritance. Mr. Elliot insisted that Sir Walter return with him and his wife to Kellynch to reclaim their rightful role in the community. That gentleman remained only a year under his son-in-law's strictures before he returned again to Bath to squander away the rest of his meager income in peace.

To the great satisfaction of all, Elizabeth gave birth to a healthy baby boy within the first year of her marriage and her happiness was complete. However, she had soon the mortification of seeing Mr Elliot withdraw, having completed the duty of begetting an heir. He soon quit Kellynch; and on Mrs Clay's quitting it soon afterwards, and being next heard of as established under his protection in London, Elizabeth's mortification was complete. She soon came to the realization that obtaining a long desired wish does not always bring happiness. While her father had allowed her free reign of the household budget, her husband enforced far stricter regulations. She therefore remained the mistress of Kellynch for the rest of her days but with far less elegance than she had enjoyed in her youth. She lived her life in bitter seclusion with her only son, who reminded her daily of her scoundrel of a husband. Her only solace was in the fact that her father never remarried out of deference to his daughter and grandson. Her son would one day be a baronet. The same could not be said of Mrs. Clay's four children with Mr. Elliot.

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Captain Benwick had remained in Bath with the Crofts for several days after the wedding, during which he spent many hours discussing his studies with Miss Louisa Musgrove. He only returned to Lyme after she departed for Uppercross. During that brief stay, his wounded heart had found solace in Miss Musgrove's solicitude. For the first time since his beloved Fanny's death, he had felt something other than despair. After allowing only a few weeks for Captain and Mrs. Wentworth to settle into married life, Captain Benwick arrived unexpectedly for an extended visit at Kellynch. The daily schedule at Kellynch again mirrored that of the fall: Frederick and Anne – assuming the roles of Sophy and the Admiral – spent most of their mornings outdoors together enjoying each other's company while Captain Benwick made daily trips to Uppercross.

He could never forget Fanny Harville, she would always be his first love and his greatest tragedy, but she was gone forever. He could either continue to whither his life away in despair or make the choice to find happiness. His attachment to Louisa Musgrove grew steadily and soon blossomed into love. Not the passionate consuming love he had known before, but a steady strong love built on companionship and mutual felicity. Her liveliness and cheer brought light again to his life and under his direction her understanding and knowledge grew.

He proposed to her on a blustery March morning where their brisk walk was warmed only by their affection. Happily, their own announcement was succeeded within days with the announcement that Charles Hayter had secured the curacy at Uppercross, allowing him and Henrietta to finally marry. So it was that the Miss Musgroves – never long to be outdone by each other, and always happiest when in accord – were married in a double ceremony. Mr. and Mrs. Hayter lived simply, but were happy in the achievement of their long held dearest wish. Captain and Mrs. Benwick lived happily in a balance of high spirits and sedate reflection which would have continued to perplex their friends were it not for clear evidence of their mutual regard.

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Anne and Frederick's marriage bore all of the fruits of a couple long denied their happiness. Anne's spring of felicity was in the warmth of her heart. Anne was tenderness itself, and she had the full worth of it in Captain Wentworth's affection. His profession was all that could ever make her friends wish that tenderness less, the dread of a future war all that could dim her sunshine. She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which
is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance.

They remained at Kellynch only three months. Agreeing that it was possible for a woman to be settled too near her family, they purchased a modest but charming estate on the sea outside of Plymouth. Their new home was happily situated a convenient distance from Kellynch and Bath as to make occasional visits feasible, but frequent visits improbable. They were an easy distance from the naval ports at Plymouth, but far enough from the city to avoid the putrid air and close confines. As they took possession of their new home just before Harville's lease at Lyme ended, they invited the Harvilles to live with them in the manor house. As Harville's pride would not allow him to live indefinitely off of the charity of his friend, he agreed to lease a suitable cottage on the property. The two families met daily and raised their children together. The Benwicks were frequent visitors as well, although Louisa could never bear to live permanently so far from her sister.

Due to his efficiency and industry, Captain Wentworth was at length promoted to Admiral Wentworth – much to her sisters' relief, he was never made a baronet. Whenever possible, Anne sailed with her husband and flourished at sea. Although some sailors objected to the presence of a woman aboard ship, her calm and obliging nature, steadiness of character, and readiness to contribute where possible – typically in the role of nurse and confidant – readily endeared her to even the most superstitious old salts. However, as their family grew, Anne was more frequently required at home. The solace of Mrs. Harville and Mrs. Benwick at these times was a balm to the unease of separation from Frederick. Thankfully, the 
Pax Britannica
offered Frederick relative protection from violence and he always returned home eagerly and safely to his wife and children. While every separation was painful and fraught with worry, they never surpassed the despair of their initial eight years estrangement because they were always secure in the knowledge of their mutual love.

The End

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