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Dramatic Publishing

PERSUASION

Adapted by
ASHLEY J. BARNARD

Based on the novel by
JANE AUSTEN



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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Based on the novel by JANE AUSTEN

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PERSUASION

CHARACTERS

ANNE ELLIOT	late 20s
ELIZABETH ELLIOT	early 30s
SIR WALTER ELLIOT	50s
LADY RUSSELL	mid- to late 40s
CAPTAIN WENTWORTH	early to mid-30s
MARY MUSGROVE	mid- to late 20s
CHARLES MUSGROVE	late 20s to early 30s
LOUISA MUSGROVE	early 20s
HENRIETTA MUSGROVE	late teens
WILLIAM ELLIOT	30s
MRS. CLAY	30s
ADMIRAL CROFT	50s
MRS. CROFT	late 40s
MRS. SMITH	late 40s to early 50s
CAPTAIN HARVILLE	mid-30s

PERSUASION

SCENE ONE

(Kellynch-hall, Somersetshire in 1814, shortly after the imprisonment of Napoleon at Elba. SIR WALTER ELLIOT and his two eldest daughters, ELIZABETH and ANNE, are assembled in the drawing room. ANNE is very low-spirited and downcast. Furnishings can be sparse as possessions have been packed up for a move. LADY RUSSELL, their dear friend and neighbor, enters. The women curtsey and SIR ELLIOT bows, a gesture that should occur between characters on stage any time someone enters or exits the scene.)

LADY RUSSELL (*embracing ANNE*). I am relieved to find I have not missed you. I understand from Mr. Shepherd you have found a tenant to rent Kellynch-hall.

SIR ELLIOT. An Admiral and Mrs. Croft. Apparently Admiral Croft is a native of Somersetshire and wishes to settle in his own country. He was—where has he been, Anne?

ANNE. He was in the Trafalgar action and was stationed several years in the East Indies.

SIR ELLIOT. There. Anne knows all about it. As for Mrs. Croft, she is not quite unconnected in this country, which is to say she had a brother who lived amongst us once, over at Monkford. I believe you were made ac-

quainted with the man, Lady Russell, though I cannot at the moment recall his name.

ANNE. I suppose you mean Mr. Wentworth.

SIR ELLIOT. Wentworth was the very name! He had the curacy of Monkford. He was a nobody, I remember; quite unconnected.

LADY RUSSELL. I never had the pleasure of making his acquaintance.

SIR ELLIOT. I daresay you knew his brother, some captain or other.

(LADY RUSSELL turns away from the conversation, and ANNE crosses to examine the window or busy herself with something. She is visibly despondent.)

LADY RUSSELL. Well. I am sorry, Sir Walter, that you must quit Kellynch-hall, though I must say it seemed the wisest option to clear some of your debts. I suppose all of you are set for Bath?

ELIZABETH. All but Anne. She is to attend to our sister Mary at Uppercross.

LADY RUSSELL. Not going to Bath?

ELIZABETH. With Mrs. Clay joining us, Anne will not be particularly needed.

LADY RUSSELL. Mrs. Clay!

ELIZABETH. And anyway, Mary insists she cannot possibly do without Anne.

LADY RUSSELL. That is all the better for me. *(Pulling ANNE back into the scene.)* I would have you stay close to me, my dear, and Uppercross is not so far. I am to go to Bath at Christmas; perhaps I can bring you to your father then?

ANNE. I should like that very well.

LADY RUSSELL. Very good. Then it's settled.

SIR WALTER. Well, then, Elizabeth. We should be fetching Mrs. Clay. (*Bowing to LADY RUSSELL and ANNE.*)
Until Christmas, ladies.

(*SIR WALTER and ELIZABETH exit. ELIZABETH, with a snotty air, does not even acknowledge her sister.*)

LADY RUSSELL. I find it particularly vexing, Anne, that your father continues to show you the indifference of a mere acquaintance.

ANNE. It has ceased to signify with me. I have long known there is nothing in me to excite his esteem.

LADY RUSSELL. I need not tell you, I'm sure, that you have always been my favorite of the three Elliot girls, and if he cannot see your merit, accomplishments and your beauty, then I am all the sorrier for him.

ANNE. Your approbation and love have always been a comfort to me, ever since the death of my mother.

LADY RUSSELL. I have always loved you like my own daughter, and hope I have always steered you in the right direction, as I know she would have done. I have...
I have always done right by you, have I not, Anne?

ANNE. Of course.

LADY RUSSELL. Though my advice may have sounded harsh at the time, I'm sure that by now you've seen the wisdom in all of my guidance.

ANNE (*looking away*). I have never doubted it.

LADY RUSSELL. There's a girl. I'll leave you, now, to attend to your sister Mary. And I expect you to call on me before the week's end!

(Exit LADY RUSSELL. ANNE stares off into space, deep in thought, as the lights go down. ANNE crosses downstage to where there should be special lighting. She has stepped back into the past, and this downstage area should be designated for her flashbacks with CAPTAIN WENTWORTH. The audience should see a drastic transformation of ANNE; she should be bright and animated, shedding eight years of disappointment and regret before our very eyes. There is festive music playing, and as ANNE is dancing backward, CAPTAIN WENTWORTH should enter from the wings, dancing backward in the opposite direction, so that their backs collide in their designated area.)

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH. Oh, good heavens. I'm dreadfully sorry.

ANNE. Forgive me, I must have been carried away—

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH. It is my fault entirely. Will you allow a clumsy oaf to make amends by sharing this dance with me?

ANNE. I should be honored, sir.

(They dance in a style suitable to the regency period, by dancing in close and then far apart, then rejoining in the center to spin each other before dancing apart again. Each time they are far apart, they should be raising their voices almost to the point of yelling.)

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH. May I have the pleasure of making your acquaintance?

ANNE. Anne Elliot, of Kellynch-hall.

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH. Captain Frederick Wentworth, your humble servant.

ANNE. How do you do, Captain Wentworth?

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH. Excellent, my dear Miss Elliot. And you?

ANNE. Very well, thank you. Are you new to Somersetshire?

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH. Yes. I'm here to visit my brother, the curate at Monkford.

ANNE. Will you be staying long?

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH. Yes, I—oh, damn this dancing! I shall lose my voice shouting to you across the floor.

(They meet in the center of their light, laughing and gasping for breath. For a moment their hands are clasped without their realizing it. CAPTAIN WENTWORTH drops his and clears his throat.)

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH. This is much better. I needn't feel like I am shouting orders to a new recruit. As I was saying I have no definite plans. I am currently in between ships and plan on staying several months in Monkford, as I find the...landscape...to be particularly to my liking.

ANNE. I'm glad to hear it.

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH. Perhaps you would do me the honor of allowing me to call on you tomorrow at Kellynch-hall?

ANNE. I should be very pleased to do so, Captain.

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH. Very good, Miss Elliot. Until tomorrow.

(He bows and kisses her hand before exiting. For a moment she stands there staring after him, quite smitten. Then the music fades as does their special light. The older, depressed ANNE moves back upstage to where LADY RUSSELL has left her. After a moment she drops her face into her hands and sobs. Lights fade to black.)

SCENE TWO

(MARY's house, Uppercross Cottage. MARY is reclining on a couch in the drawing room while ANNE is pouring tea from a nearby table.)

ANNE *(handing MARY her tea as she sits by her on the sofa)*. There you are, my dear. Are you really so dreadfully ill?

MARY. My heavens, yes. I think I'm going to die. I'm quite sure I cannot even ring the bell! Though I daresay Charles would hardly notice if I did die.

ANNE. Mary, if you'll forgive me for saying so, this is the third time this month you've nearly died. I'll venture to guess you'll be recovered soon. Don't I always raise your spirits?

MARY. I suppose. But I really may die this time, Anne. Those children, at any rate, shall be the death of me. I suppose Father and Elizabeth are off to Bath?

ANNE. And Mrs. Clay.

MARY. Oh, yes. How could I forget dear Mrs. Clay, who disgraced her family honor by leaving her husband and burdening her father with the care of her two children?

What Elizabeth sees in her as a friend I have never understood.

ANNE. It is not so much Elizabeth with whom I am concerned, but rather Father. Indeed, if I may tell you in confidence, I am suspicious of Mrs. Clay's motives in her desire to accompany them to Bath.

MARY. Whatever can you mean?

ANNE. Only that with the recent passing of Mrs. Clay's husband and our father's own eligibility...

MARY. Oh, phoo. Father has no romantic interest in Mrs. Clay whatsoever. Mrs. Clay has freckles, a projecting tooth and a clumsy wrist, upon which Father is continually making severe remarks. Freckles do not disgust me so very much as they do him. He abominates them! You must have heard him notice Mrs. Clay's freckles.

ANNE. There is hardly any personal defect which an agreeable manner might not gradually reconcile one to.

MARY. An agreeable manner may set off handsome features, but can never alter plain ones.

(Enter MARY'S husband, CHARLES MUSGROVE. He may carry in a period-appropriate rifle and is dressed for the outdoors. ANNE rises to greet him and he bows.)

CHARLES. How do you do, Anne? You've come to raise my dear wife back from dead again? I do wish you could persuade her not to be always fancying herself ill.

MARY. Anne, if you would, you might persuade Charles that I really am ill—a great deal worse than I ever own. *(Looking out the window or wings.)* Charles, are those your sisters I see outside?

CHARLES. I'm afraid so. Captain Wentworth and I were accosted by them on our return from our shooting expedition.

(ANNE chokes on her tea and stands to peer out into the wings or window.)

ANNE. Captain Wentworth!

CHARLES. Indeed. He is lately returned to England, and upon having heard that his sister and brother-in-law are to rent Kellynch-hall, has come here to visit them, stopping first to pay his respects to my parents at the great house and offer his condolences.

MARY. Yes, for poor Richard. You knew, Anne, did you not, that Charles' brother Richard served under Captain Wentworth before he died?

ANNE. No, I did not know it.

CHARLES. Are you much acquainted with Captain Wentworth?

ANNE. I...vaguely.

CHARLES *(sitting at the table and picking up a newspaper)*. A fine, dashing fellow; I've never met a more pleasant man in all my life. Made some impressive captures shortly following his last stay here, what, six, seven years ago?

ANNE. Eight.

CHARLES. Made a good fortune, some twenty-five-thousand pounds. Naturally my sisters are quite taken with him. He's undoubtedly come here looking for a wife; either of my sisters would suit him though I think he is more impressed with Louisa.

MARY. Nonsense. It is Henrietta whom he likes best.

CHARLES. Regardless, it would be a capital match for either of my sisters.

MARY. Upon my word it would. Dear me! If he should rise to any very great honors! If he should ever be made a baronet! "Lady Wentworth" sounds very well. That would be a very noble thing, indeed, for Henrietta. And that would put an end to the pretensions of her cousin Charles Hayter.

CHARLES. Our cousin Charles is an amiable fellow—

MARY. Nothing but a country curate.

CHARLES. —Who has a very fair chance of getting something from the bishop in the course of a year or two, plus he will inherit the estate at Winthrop. It would not be a great match for Henrietta, but I daresay she could do much worse. And if she has him, and Louisa can get Captain Wentworth, I shall be very well satisfied.

(Enter CAPTAIN WENTWORTH and Charles' sisters LOUISA and HENRIETTA. CAPTAIN WENTWORTH and ANNE stand face to face, not saying a word while LOUISA and HENRIETTA are full of energy and are oblivious.)

LOUISA. Captain Wentworth has agreed to stay for supper, and—

HENRIETTA. —Has most gallantly promised to tell us stories of his great adventures aboard the *Asp* and *Laconia*!

(They wait for CAPTAIN WENTWORTH to respond, but he is still absorbed by ANNE. As upstage lights dim, ANNE and CAPTAIN WENTWORTH move downstage to

their special area, where their light comes up. The remaining actors upstage freeze in the dark. We have gone back once again to eight years prior. CAPTAIN WENTWORTH and ANNE meet in the center of their light, their hands clasped together.)

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH. I daresay I am trying your father's patience having called on you every day these past few weeks. He does not approve of me, I think.

ANNE. Then let *my* approval of you make up for it, for it is unrivaled, as are my esteem and affection for you.

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH. A bold sentiment, which lends me the strength to make my own. Miss Elliot—Anne—These past few weeks have been...I cannot fully express how much I...oh, damn it all, Anne, you know how I feel about decorum. (*Kissing her.*) Say my name. Let me hear you say my name.

ANNE (*in a passionate whisper*). Frederick.

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH. That is the most beautiful thing I have ever heard. I would have my name be the first word on your lips every morning as you awaken. (*ANNE starts to swoon. CAPTAIN WENTWORTH catches her and kisses her again.*) Marry me, Anne.

ANNE. I will. Oh, yes, of course! (*They embrace.*)

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH. Then I shall ask your father's permission. He may not consent, however, Anne. I have no fortune as of yet, but I promise you that I shall.

ANNE. I have no fear on that account. And if he should refuse, why...I shall marry you anyway.

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH. Dear Anne! And if your friend Lady Russell should express her disapproval?