



Persuasion

Royal Exchange Theatre production 2017

SYNOPSIS

KELLYNCH HALL

Persuasion begins at Kellynch Hall in Somersetshire, the manor house belonging to Sir Walter Elliot, a Baron, where he lives with two of his unmarried daughters, Elizabeth (29) and Anne (27), and Elizabeth's widowed companion, Mrs Clay.

The family are in crisis. Elizabeth has been desperate to be married for the last decade but nobody will propose to her. At the top of the play, she discovers her latest beau was not as in love with her as he seemed, and will be married to a younger woman.

Desperate to meet more potential suitors, Elizabeth demands that the family decamp to London, but Sir Walter reveals that the family are heavily in debt. Finding husbands is expensive, they cannot afford their lifestyle anymore.

To find a way out of this mess they turn to Lady Russell, a widowed neighbour who is Godmother to Anne. Her advice is stark. Their debts are so bad that if they have to be in a city where Elizabeth can find a husband, they must rent out Kellynch Hall and move to Bath.

Sir Walter, Elizabeth and Mrs Clay are delighted by this, and begin the search for a tenant for Kellynch, but Anne is devastated. She doesn't want to be married. She doesn't want to go to Bath. She begs Lady Russell to stay with her but she refuses, saying Anne must go out into the world and find herself a husband too.

Playing for time, Anne begs Elizabeth and her father if she can go and stay with Mary, their younger sister, who is not well. Anne will join them in Bath in a few months' time. Sir Walter agrees, and suggests that Anne might visit the new tenants of Kellynch as Mary only lives three miles away. They are an

Admiral Croft and his wife. Elizabeth is surprised Anne hasn't heard of them – Mrs Croft's brother lived near Kellynch eight years ago – his name was Captain Wentworth. Elizabeth was sure Anne was acquainted with him.

Anne doesn't answer, but as they head off for Bath, it is clear that she knows exactly who Captain Wentworth is. She is struck by a memory of him.

UPPERCROSS

At her sister Mary's house, Uppercross, Anne finds a marriage in turmoil. Mary is unhappy with her husband Charles – she feels she has to do all the work, look after their child Samuel by herself, and resents being beholden to Charles' family – their house is on his parents' grounds, and Mary feels they don't pay her enough respect. Charles is happy to see Anne but quickly ends up arguing with Mary.

Charles' sisters, Louisa and Henrietta, come by to say hello. They are just out of school and completely taken up with dancing and looking for husbands. Henrietta has an admirer in the next village – Edmund Hayter, a vicar in training, who Mary doesn't approve of because he has no money – but Louisa is more ambitious, and wants to find a richer, more glamorous husband. They will be travelling to Bath soon and she expects to find one there. They both really like Anne, but it becomes clear they see her as a spinster who has long ago forfeited her chance of marriage.

Next to visit are Admiral and Mrs Croft, the new tenants of Kellynch Hall. They are very kind and in love. But they bring news – Captain Wentworth is coming to stay with them tomorrow. He is unmarried and incredibly successful. Mary, Charles and the Crofts think that he might be interested in Louisa (Mary maintains that Henrietta should abandon Edmund Hayter to pursue someone of Wentworth's stature). Once again, Mrs Croft asks Anne if she didn't know Wentworth 8 years ago when he was in the area. Once again, Anne doesn't answer.

Anne is struck by a memory of her and Lady Russell 8 years ago. We find out what happened between her and Wentworth. It seems they were engaged. In the memory Lady Russell is persuading her out of her engagement with Captain Wentworth – she is only nineteen, and he is a young captain in a very uncertain profession – before she knows it she could have children and he'd be dead in the war. She shouldn't marry him, but wait until another, better suitor comes along – Lady Russell tells her she's got all the time in the world to find someone new.

We are back in the present. Henrietta and Louisa and Mary are excited about going to the big house to see Captain Wentworth for dinner that evening. Anne finds the prospect of this unendurable, but is rescued when Samuel, Mary and Charles' young son, falls out of a tree and hurts his shoulder. Henrietta and Louisa leave straight away for dinner, and after some arguing, so does Charles, and then Mary, leaving Anne with Samuel.

The next day, though, Wentworth arrives. He has called by to go shooting with Charles. They see each other for the first time in eight years.

It seems that everyone fell in love with Wentworth at the party the night before – Henrietta and Louisa, Charles and Mary. Anne has no choice but to go and have dinner with them all again the following evening.

Here, Louisa insists on telling Anne everything she had heard about Wentworth the night before – about how eight years ago he had nothing, but in the intervening period he has become such a rich and successful naval hero. The talk turns to how he should get a wife, and Louisa and Henrietta both volunteer to dance with him.

Everyone dances except Anne. Henrietta and Louisa compete quite aggressively for Wentworth's attention, but then Edmund Hayter arrives while Henrietta is really going for it. He is mortified and leaves on his dignity.

Henrietta then confides in Anne – she isn't sure whether to settle with kind, dependable, but poor Edmund, or be more ambitious in her romantic aspirations and try and fight Louisa for Wentworth. Anne tells her she should follow her heart, sharing the story of her 'friend' (really the story of her and Wentworth), who was persuaded out of marrying her true love and never found love again. Henrietta decides to throw her lot in with Edmund.

With Henrietta off the scene, Louisa makes her move. Anne accidentally witnesses a meeting between her and Wentworth where Louisa makes her interest in him clear. Wentworth part-responds, but seems unable to commit totally to her advances. He starts talking about constancy, about how his friend Benwick loved a woman so much, that when she tragically died before they could get married he was so struck with grief that he could only live alone, in sorrow, at Lyme Regis. Louisa proposes that they should visit Benwick there. A trip is organised and everyone goes to the seaside.

LYME REGIS

While they look at the sea they meet Captain Benwick. He seems depressed, but Louisa isn't really bothered. She drags Wentworth away to go in the sea with her.

Watching Wentworth and Louisa in the sea, Anne and Benwick talk about love. Anne doesn't want anything to do with it, but Benwick shows an interest in her – exhorts her not to give up on love, on the possibility of it happening for her. Even though his fiancé died, love was the best thing that ever happened to him...

As Benwick leaves, everyone tells Anne to come in the sea, teasing her about how Benwick fancies her. Anne starts getting cross with them, but even as she does so she is noticed by another man – a stranger who sees her and then leaves. Mary identifies this man as Mr Elliott – their second cousin, a man who had courted Elizabeth ten years ago and led her to believe he would marry her, before marrying a woman of much lower social status but who had much more money. What was he doing in Lyme Regis?

While this has been going on, Louisa and Wentworth have still been playing. They are on the Cobb – a large pier at Lyme, and she keeps climbing higher, asking Wentworth to catch her. In her excitement she climbs too high, jumps and hits her head. It's a disaster. The only one who keeps her cool is Anne – She arranges for Louisa's care before taking Henrietta back to Uppercross. The last she sees of Wentworth is him taking Louisa's body to Benwick's house.

INTERVAL

BATH

Anne is reunited with Lady Russell. She gets her up to date with Louisa's accident. Apparently she is still recuperating at Lyme. Lady Russell is shocked that Louisa's suitor is Captain Wentworth, but Anne doesn't want to talk about it. Lady Russell mollifies her with talk about Benwick – apparently he is interested in Anne and will be visiting Bath soon...

Sir Walter, Elizabeth and Mrs Clay are incredibly happy in Bath. That night they'll be going to Lady Dalrymple's Ball, one of the smartest parties of the season. Elizabeth has been seeing more and more of Mr Elliott – the second cousin who Anne saw at Lyme. He has been able to explain to Sir Walter and Elizabeth why he let them down ten years ago. In any case his first wife has died and now he is pursuing Elizabeth again. It seems they will be married soon.

Elliott arrives, charms Elizabeth, Sir Walter and Lady Russell and is struck by Anne – was she the woman he'd seen at Lyme? She was. He is impressed.

Lady Dalrymple's Ball begins and Anne is unimpressed. It seems vacuous. Elliott talks to Anne and she tells him as much. He encourages her to see it as a means to an end – for someone with her charm and beauty she should relax her scruples and embrace society.

To Lady Russell, Anne has to admit that it appears Benwick isn't coming to Bath after all. Lady Russell wonders if Anne is interested in Elliot. Anne denies this entirely – he is after Elizabeth anyway. Lady Russell exhorts her to open her eyes – Mr Elliot likes her and she should take the chance to get married to such a good catch – she's not getting any younger and needs to get on with it.

Mrs Clay and Elizabeth have gossip from Mary, who is coming to visit them in Bath soon. Apparently Louisa has got married in complete haste to a naval captain. Anne tells them this must be Wentworth.

Elliot finds Anne and asks her to dance. She does.

As soon as she finishes she bumps into Wentworth. He has come to Bath. Without Louisa because he didn't marry her after all. It was Benwick who married her – they fell in love while she was recuperating at his house in Lyme. Wentworth then came straight to Bath with the Crofts, looking for Anne...

Elliot finds Anne again and meets Wentworth.

Mary and Charles arrive. They have heard gossip from Lady Russell that Anne is to be married to Elliot which Anne tries to shut down.

Anne finds Wentworth eager to leave Bath. He doesn't like the atmosphere and thinks he's out of the picture with Anne. She works hard to persuade him to stay and they have a meaningful conversation about constancy, about how love never dies, until they are interrupted by Elliot again

Elliott drags Anne away from Wentworth and demands that she dance with him again. Anne refuses. He becomes unpleasant. Anne has to force him away.

At which moment Wentworth asks her to dance. Shaken up, Anne refuses,

and Lady Russell comes in to say that she's heard from Mr Elliot that they are to be married. Upon hearing this, Wentworth storms off, saying there is nothing for him in Bath.

Elliot makes a public proposal to Anne and everyone gets incredibly excited. Anne has to publicly reject him and despite Lady Russell's exhortations, leaves. At which point Elliot moves his proposal back to Elizabeth who, despite Mrs Clay's advice, accepts.

Leaving the ball, Anne bumps into Admiral and Mrs Croft and Captain Wentworth who is leaving Bath to go back to sea. After a terse conversation, Anne and the Crofts fall into a conversation about Louisa and Benwick, about whether men or women are more constant in love. Anne makes it clear that women are not shifting and inconstant, but that the love she has felt has been forever.

That does it for Wentworth. He gives Anne a letter that expresses his true feelings, that he loves her, that he has always loved her, and they are able to finally get married despite everything that has happened...

CAST



Lady Russell/
Mrs Croft
GERALDINE
ALEXANDER



Sir Walter/
Admiral Croft
ANTONY
BUNSEE



Mary
HELEN CRIPPS



Captain
Wentworth
SAMUEL
EDWARD-
COOK



Elizabeth/
Louisa
CASSIE
LAYTON



Mrs Clay/
Henrietta
CAROLINE
MORONEY



Anne
LARA ROSSI



Charles
DORIAN
SIMPSON



Edmund
Hayter/
Captain
Benwick/ Mr
Elliot
ARTHUR
WILSON



Samuel
NOAH HICKS



Samuel
SHANE
SHANTHAKUMAR



Samuel
DANIEL TARIQ