

The Elliots of Kellynch Hall

Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch Hall in Somerset, only ever read one book: *The Baronetage*, a book about all the baronets²⁵ in England. He always started the book at the same page, which read:

ELLIOT OF KELLYNCH HALL

Walter Elliot, born 1760, married Elizabeth, 1784 (died 1800).
Three children: Elizabeth (born 1785), Anne (born 1787),
Mary (born 1791).

Following this there was a history of the Elliot family. Then, at the end of the page, it read: *Family home: Kellynch Hall in Somerset.*

When Sir Walter was upset about something, he always read this page. And reading about his family always made him feel better. Vanity²⁶ was the most important part of Sir Walter's character. He was a baronet. He knew that he was very good-looking, too. Because he had beauty and a baronetage, he thought that he was a very important man.

Perhaps because of these two things, he had found a very good wife for himself. Lady Elliot's character was much better than Sir Walter's. She was kind and sensible, and she was a good wife and mother. She also had a good friend called Lady Russell, who lived near the family in Kellynch Lodge²⁷ and helped Lady Elliot with her daughters.

After seventeen years of marriage²⁸, Lady Elliot sadly died. When she died, her three daughters were only ten, fourteen and sixteen years old. Luckily, these three girls were not left alone with their vain, silly father. Lady Russell was there to look after them. She was a very important friend to the Elliots and she

loved the three girls very much. Many people expected²⁹ Lady Russell and Sir Walter to marry after Lady Elliot died. In fact, they did not marry.

Lady Russell loved all the girls, but Anne was her favourite. Lady Russell could see Lady Elliot's kind character in Anne, but not in her sisters. It was now thirteen years since Lady Elliot had died, and for Lady Russell, Anne had become a great friend.

For Sir Walter, however, Anne was not important. He was most interested in his eldest daughter, Elizabeth. Elizabeth was very good-looking and very like her father in character. She had become the mistress³⁰ of Kellynch Hall when her mother died, and Sir Walter would do anything for her. His other daughters were much less important to him. His youngest daughter, Mary, had married a man from a good country family and had become Mrs Charles Musgrove. Because of this, she was now a little more important to Sir Walter. But Anne, who was clever and had a lovely character, was nobody to her father or her older sister. They did not listen to her. She was just Anne.

Anne Elliot had been a very pretty girl when she was young, but had lost her beauty early. Sir Walter no longer expected her to marry well. But Elizabeth – Miss Elliot – was still beautiful now, at twenty-nine years old. Sir Walter continued to believe that she would marry into a family as important as his own.

Elizabeth herself knew that she was still beautiful. But she had been mistress of Kellynch Hall for thirteen years now. For thirteen years, she had opened every ball in and around Kellynch and she had spent thirteen springs in London with her father. Elizabeth felt that she was getting older and she needed to find a good baronet for a husband soon.

At one time, Elizabeth had hoped to marry her cousin, William Elliot. This cousin was Sir Walter Elliot's heir³¹, because Elizabeth did not have any brothers. Sir Walter had

always planned that Elizabeth would marry William. Elizabeth first met her cousin in London when she was still very young and she liked him very much. At that time, Sir Walter invited William to Kellynch Hall, but he never came. The next year, Sir Walter and Elizabeth saw William again in London and invited him once more. But again he did not come, and soon after this they heard that William was married. He had married a woman who was rich, but was not from a good family. Sir Walter was not pleased about this marriage. William was his heir. Why had he not spoken to Sir Walter before marrying? But William did not seem sorry. He showed that he was not at all worried about the Elliots' feelings. The Elliot family did not see William or hear from him anymore. They heard that his wife had now died. But they also knew from friends that William talked very badly about the Elliot family. It was clear that he did not care³² about the baronetage which he was going to inherit. Sir Walter's family were not pleased with William Elliot.

Elizabeth was getting older and she spent a lot of time thinking about it. She was worrying about something else, too. Sir Walter had problems with money. Lady Elliot had always been very careful with their money. However, after she died, no one had stopped Sir Walter from spending too much. He did not tell Elizabeth about the problem at first. But he could not hide it from her for long.

'Is there a way that we can spend a little less money?' Sir Walter had asked Elizabeth the year before, while they were in London. Elizabeth thought of a few ideas. They would not buy new furniture for the house, they would give less money to the poor and they would not bring a present back from London for Anne. But the problem was much bigger than Elizabeth had thought. Sir Walter had to tell her that these small changes would not be enough to help them.

Their friend, Lady Russell, tried to help. She wanted Sir Walter and Elizabeth to save money without making too many

difficult changes to their lives. With Anne's help, Lady Russell made a list of changes for the family. But when Sir Walter and Elizabeth heard Lady Russell's ideas, they were appalled³³.

'What?' cried Sir Walter. 'Fewer trips to London, fewer horses, fewer servants, fewer everything? I will not be able to live like a gentleman³⁴. No, I would rather leave Kellynch Hall now than live like that!'

After a few days of talking and thinking, it was decided that Sir Walter would leave Kellynch Hall. The Elliots talked about going to London, Bath or another house in the countryside. Anne wanted to move to a smaller house in the countryside, so she could still be near her sister, Mary, and Lady Russell. She did not like Bath. But as usual, Sir Walter and Elizabeth did not listen to Anne. They decided to go to Bath.

Lady Russell had to disagree with Anne. She could see that it would be too difficult for Sir Walter to live in a smaller house near Kellynch. Lady Russell spent some time in Bath every winter and she felt that the change would be good for Anne. Anne stayed at home too much, Lady Russell thought, and she should meet more people.

Lady Russell wanted the Elliots to move to Bath for another reason, too. Elizabeth had become very good friends with a clever young woman called Mrs Clay. Mrs Clay was not from an important family. She had also married badly and was not with her husband anymore. But she knew how to please everyone at Kellynch Hall. Elizabeth listened to Mrs Clay much more than she listened to her own sister, Anne. Lady Russell thought that Mrs Clay was a dangerous friend for Elizabeth. She hoped that by moving to Bath, the Elliots would leave Mrs Clay behind.



'I will not be able to live like a gentleman.'

Difficult News for Anne

Baronets did not usually need to let their houses and so Sir Walter would not talk about letting Kellynch Hall. But he agreed that if an important person needed a house like Kellynch Hall, he might very kindly help them. Soon after this, his lawyer, Mr Shepherd, told Sir Walter that a man called Admiral Croft was looking for a house in Somerset. Admiral Croft had heard about Kellynch Hall, Mr Shepherd said. Although he had not seen the house, he was very interested in it.

'Admiral Croft is the son of a gentleman,' Mr Shepherd told Sir Walter. 'His wife is a very polite, well-spoken lady. She is very interested in the house and already knows Kellynch! Her brother lived near here, at Monkford, a few years ago. Now, what was his name?' Mr Shepherd thought for a few moments. 'Oh, I remember the gentleman so well, but I cannot think of his name.'

'You mean Mr Wentworth, I expect,' said Anne.

'Mr Wentworth!' cried Mr Shepherd. 'That was him! He lived at Monkford for two or three years, Sir Walter. You remember him, I am sure.'

'Wentworth?' said Sir Walter. 'Oh yes, I remember him. But you called him a gentleman. He was not a gentleman. Mr Wentworth was not an important man, I remember.'

Sir Walter could never be pleased with anyone who lived in his house. However, at last he agreed that Admiral Croft could come to look at Kellynch Hall. Sir Walter could see that it would be good to let the house to an admiral. An admiral was important enough, but not too important. 'I have let my house to Admiral Croft,' sounded much better than 'I have let

my house to Mr X or Y.' An admiral would also know that he could never be as important as a baronet.

Sir Walter would never do anything without first asking Elizabeth. As she now wanted to move to Bath as soon as possible, she was very happy to let Kellynch Hall. Anne, who had listened carefully to Sir Walter's conversation with Mr Shepherd, now left the room. When she had thought about the Wentworth family, her face had become hot. Now she needed some fresh air.

Mr Wentworth, who Sir Walter and Mr Shepherd had talked about, was nothing to Anne. But, eight years before, she had been in love with his brother, Captain Frederick Wentworth. Captain Wentworth, like Admiral Croft, was in the navy, and in summer 1806 he had come to live in Somerset with his brother. He was a very good-looking and clever young man, and Anne was a very kind, sensible girl. As they began to know each other, they fell deeply in love. And for a short time, they were very happy together.

However, when they asked Sir Walter if they could get engaged, he was very cold. He did not think that Captain Wentworth was good enough for his family. Although Lady Russell was kinder than Sir Walter, she too believed the engagement was not a good idea. Anne was only nineteen at the time. She was beautiful and clever, and from a good family, and Lady Russell thought that she was throwing herself away³⁵.

Captain Wentworth had no money, but he said he was sure that he would soon have a ship and be rich. He had always been lucky and he knew that he always would be. But when she heard this, Lady Russell felt even more worried about Captain Wentworth. He believed in himself too much, she thought. He was too clever and he had a dangerous character.

Anne was young and good-hearted³⁶. She was strong enough not to listen to her father. But she had always trusted³⁷

and loved Lady Russell. At last Lady Russell persuaded³⁸ her that the engagement was wrong, both for Anne and Captain Wentworth.

Captain Wentworth himself could not see that it was wrong. He was hurt and angry that Lady Russell had persuaded Anne not to marry him. He left Somerset at once.

After he had gone, Anne felt terribly sad and sorry. She did not enjoy being young anymore and she began to lose her beauty. When she was twenty-two, a man called Charles Musgrove asked Anne to marry him. He had a good character and was from a rich, important family. Lady Russell hoped that Anne would say yes. But for Anne, no one could come near Frederick Wentworth in her heart, and so she refused Charles Musgrove. He then married Anne's younger sister, Mary, instead.

Lady Russell was very worried. Would Anne ever find a clever man from a good family to marry? Anne, who was now twenty-seven, had thought a lot about everything that had happened with Captain Wentworth. She now felt strongly that it was wrong to persuade a young girl not to marry the man she loved.

She knew that she would be happier now if she was married to Captain Wentworth. She knew too, from reading newspapers and navy lists³⁹, that he had been right about himself. He had done very well in the navy and was now a rich man.

So when Anne heard that Captain Wentworth's sister might soon live at Kellynch Hall, it was very painful⁴⁰ for her. She knew that her sister, Mary, and Mrs Croft did not know that she had ever met Captain Wentworth. She also felt sure that Sir Walter, Elizabeth and Lady Russell would say nothing about it. So she hoped that when she met the Crofts, it would not be too difficult.