

## Steps leading into the sea

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/13045785) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/13045785>.

Rating:	<a href="#">General Audiences</a>
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Category:	<a href="#">F/M</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Persuasion - Jane Austen</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">Anne Elliot/Frederick Wentworth</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Anne Elliot</a> , <a href="#">Frederick Wentworth</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Marriage</a> , <a href="#">People Change People</a> , <a href="#">Family</a> , <a href="#">Families of Choice</a> , <a href="#">Three Things</a>
Language:	English
Collections:	<a href="#">Yuletide 2017</a>
Stats:	Published: 2017-12-17 Words: 1,638 Chapters: 1/1

# **Steps leading into the sea**

by [lotesse](#)

## Summary

Three things Anne Wentworth, née Elliot, gained by her marriage.

The first change was touch. Indeed, this shift in her condition, from one always untouched to one who could expect caresses both passing and earthshaking to be offered regularly, manifested itself some several days, if not weeks, before the actual nuptials were at long last consecrated. She was not at all accustomed to it – but she took to the new closeness with ease, feeling not at all reserved with her fiancé. She had known him so long, loved him so dear, that any fear of his touch she might have had was but a small and fleeting thing.

Pressing increasingly ardent kisses up his bride-to-be's fingers, wrists, arms and neck, Mr. Wentworth – Frederick, as Anne now dared openly call him, the sweet name in her mouth making her feel hopeful and girlish with her memories of using it before, long ago – Frederick said in a soft and breathless tone, “Anne, Anne, did you never dream of this?”

“I did,” she told him.

“When? Oh, Anne, tell me when. When we were courting? After? Last year? Last night?”

“Both. All of those. Yes.”

Pulling back from his attentions to her throat, he said, “You are teasing me! Capricious Anne! But I will have your answer in more words than just that one.”

She answered him more frankly than was her wont, unable to deny him the asked-for pleasure of her confession. “More than once, I have thought on the kisses we shared as children ... even when alone in private, from time to time, I have found myself drifting into reverie ... it was presumptuous, you were not mine, but I could not help thinking – ” But there she cut off rather abruptly, having confessed herself into a state of profound embarrassment that caused her to drop her head and hide her eyes.

Beside her, Frederick's voice was gentle and reflective, returning her confidence; he said, descending down with her into vulnerability, “I, likewise, Anne – I can not number for you the times when, alone among strangers in the discomfort and stress of a sailor's berth, my mind returned to you, as I had first known you that spring, as I had come to know you better in that wonderful, terrible year – as I had hoped to know you better still, with the deep and abiding intimacy of long companionship within a condition of happy matrimony.”

She looked at him again, then, her affianced husband, and remembered the sorrows and regrets of yesteryear; and her heart grew so tender and full of love for him that she felt her body could scarcely hope to hold it. So she moved closer to him, pressing up against the strong line of his shoulder and torso, and turned her face up to kiss his mouth.

Barely able to speak for breathlessness and interrupted by the kisses she could not seem to stop herself from dropping on his lips, she said, “When I was a girl – oh – I thought of what – oh – of what great happiness it would be to be – ah, *Frederick* – it would be to be your wife.”

Holding her closer, he kissed her more deeply than: a lover's kiss, freighted with heat and desire, with anticipation of things to come shortly and that thousand delights that yet hung out of reach along the curve of their lives together.

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There were other changes, too, less secret and passionate, but in their way no less delightful, to Anne's life after she was married.

From the earliest moments of her renewed hopes and fears in the direction of Mr. Wentworth, Anne had been struck by how pleasant the company around him was. The Crofts were generous and traveled; Captain Hargrove was kind and thoughtful; and when she was re-introduced to their society as Mrs. Frederick Wentworth, the transformation of her daily life by their constant presence was immeasurable.

Their company, Anne had to admit to herself in her private heart, was far more congenial to her than that of her previous familial co-habitants. No longer were her father, her sisters, always too absorbed in their own lives and cares to think of hers, the sum circle of her waking life; the intense but also demanding mentoring presence of Lady Russell her only other option for regular human intercourse; instead, a host of friends were close to hand. And, as the first year of her married life went on there were others, new friends met for the first time in port towns and shipboard captain's tables.

Capable, hard-working, professional people with a wider knowledge of the world now invited her to sit with them as co-equal; and she found her own store of knowledge of the world, its peoples and its troubles increased rapidly under the new form of tutelage. It was so good to understand how things fit together! To learn not only facts, of the sort ladies were fashionably taught, but factual information and practical knowledge that could be demonstrated, explained, examined from all angles without showing fault, fragmentation or weakness.

It was not the sea but the shore that came to win her heart, the shore life where once wave of people was constantly rushing up against another, where the streams of objects and ideas created a world apart, a reality blended together from a hundred other walks of life. Anne was somewhat nervous, the first time she ventured out into the cosmopolitan world of a port town without Frederick's company; but she was never alone, for the society of other Navy wives and retired officers was an always-present surety. Mrs. Croft she came to find an able correspondent, and the two women penned volumes of letters, posted across Europe and beyond.

It became Anne's delight to travel to meet her husband, when she received word that his ship was to come in for a time. She would wait for him along the strand, walking and watching the bustle of the harbor, the churn of the sea and the sky; and meet him, with his fellows, break bread with them in a public house or captain's dining room; and then sleep in perfect, blissful repose, safe in Frederick's arms, rocking in the warm dark of his cabin aboard.

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But perhaps the most unexpected – yet dearly valued – thing that Anne Wentworth, née Elliot, gained by her marriage was solitude; the solitude of the marriage itself, which seemed to spread a protective cape around her and all of her concerns, hiding her from prying eyes; solitude of a kind she had never previously known. No more did Lady Russell dictate; no more her father carp about his standards where she might be sure to hear; no more was her time presumed by everyone to be at their exclusive disposal.

It spread out around her even when she was way from home. In rented rooms or public walks, in Bath, Lyme, London and Paris, she found that she could maintain a private equilibrium. Wherever she walked, she had space enough around her; she could do what she would, mistress of her house, her time, and her fate.

One might have thought that the arrival of their children, when it commenced in the years following their glad nuptials, would have marked the end of this pleasant state of affairs; but Anne found that there was a world of difference between playing with her nephews, always under the eye of her sister and brother-in-law, with their various unsettled aspects and traits; and life with her own sons and daughters. Raising her family proved to be a much simpler, pleasanter endeavor than nursing Mary's had been, as there were only the occasional irrational outbursts to manage from the children, and far less attention needed to a mother's delicate nerves.

Her children had not made Anne delicate; quite the contrary, she found that life with them was so rugged and rough-and-tumble that she was happily shaken out of some of her old habits of tenuousness and reserve. They were her companions when she traveled, her helpers when at home; and she had many hundred hours of quiet joy as a participant in their young lives. She heard their excitements, their woes, their imaginings and their budding philosophies, and took each new impression gleaned from their infant experiences as a fresh layering over her own, so that she was never tired of the world but always keenly interested in the places and lives around them.

Too, she had the aid and support of her husband, who when home from sea would speak to his small relations with an engaging seriousness that deeply touched his wife's heart, and when away sent them sober missives of reminder and encouragement. That they were diligent and respectful he was always happy to hear; but that they had taken good and gentle care with their mother, and kept her faithfully from loneliness while he was away, was the best report they could write to gladden his heart.

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And so, surrounded by her family, stimulated by travel, good company and healthy activity out-of-doors at the seaside, it may be said that Anne Wentworth found married life to be so altogether different as the life she had previously known that they were scarcely to be contained together under the same label. Still, every life is composed of lifts and lowerings; and who could say that the course of Anne's life as it ran was the way intended? The hand of fate is not always generous; perhaps the measure meted for her had always held a more-than-common amount of bitter gall. The only sure thing we have is the present love of those that love us, and the memories of loves past; hopes of loves future are fragile bubbles that may be dispersed by the wind, and regrets of loves not enjoyed are as futile as words writ in water.

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