

SWAY

S D Anugyan

Foreword for the Online Extract of ‘Sway’

My role in screenplays has tended to be that of script doctor. My own projects never seemed to get that far despite support and one or two connections. This is largely due to an innate laziness – once I write something I’m quickly and invariably drawn to the next endeavour, and keen to get on. I read aghast and impressed of film makers who spend five years devoted to bringing their dream to screen.

‘Sway’ was one such project that never saw the light of day. It was inspired by the revelation of how important ‘Persuasion’ could be to a modern audience, and that all the characters could easily be transposed to a contemporary setting, including the Royal Navy. I also saw that the archaic views of the Elliots could make for some amusing contrast, with Anne’s virtues shining even rather differently than in the original, and her father perhaps emerging as somewhat heroic.

I had considerable support from the screenwriter Jennifer Harpur, and her naval friend Philip Doyne-Ditmas, whom I met one memorable day on the HMS Belfast, and whose advice was invaluable.

The antics of the Elliots at loose in contemporary London still bring a smile to my lips when I think of them, and I am only sorry that more people have not yet experienced that pleasure. Here anyway is a glimpse of what might have been.

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Note: In the translation from the screenwriting programme to PDF, some of the formatting has been lost.

EXT. 5 MILES OFF THE AFRICAN COAST - DAY

Grey sky.

ANGLE DOWN following a Lynx helicopter. Several ships are engaged in conflict, one of which is the HMS Laconia, a patrol vessel of the Hunt class. It is engaged in a firefight with numerous small boats, including a green speedboat, that are attempting to board a cruise vessel flying the German flag.

Caption: 20th April 2009. 5 miles off the coast of Bensolema, East Africa.

Heavily outnumbered, the little Royal Navy vessel seems to have bitten off more than it can chew.

INT. BRIDGE. LACONIA - CONTINUOUS

Lieutenant Commander IMAN AZAD (32) keeping his cool, keeping his men together, lowers his binoculars and turns away from the window to face Lieutenant BEN MORRIS (28), a surly Royal Marine who has been awaiting orders.

AZAD

(To MORRIS)

Get all your men starboard aft. Now.

MORRIS

Yes, sir.

Morris leaves.

EXT. PORT BOW. LACONIA - CONTINUOUS

The Sergeant and five other Royal Marines are checking their weapons when Morris arrives. They look expectantly at him.

MORRIS

Everyone. Starboard aft.

SERGEANT

Starboard? But, sir, the enemy are...

He gestures off the port bow to the approaching pirate vessels.

MORRIS

It's what the captain ordered. It's
what we'll do. Move it.

P.O.V. LYNX COCKPIT. - CONTINUOUS

The Laconia is moving away from the other boats. In the Lynx
watching all this are the PILOT and the OBSERVER.

OBSERVER

What is he doing? Running? He can only
do fifteen knots.

Beat.

PILOT

He's not running.

INT. BRIDGE. LACONIA - CONTINUOUS

Azad looking through binoculars at the pirate ships on the port
side. There are SHOUTS and Sounds of GUNFIRE everywhere.

P.O.V. AZAD'S BINOCULARS - CONTINUOUS

Amidst the numerous little ships, centre view is a man with a
shoulder-launch missile aiming it straight for the Laconia, with
difficulty due to the boat's rocking motion.

INT. BRIDGE. LACONIA - CONTINUOUS

Azad turns and yells to the OFFICER at the conning position.

AZAD

Now! Slow ahead! Both engines.

He runs towards the door, making eye contact with the officer
who has been forewarned. He nods affirmatively.

AZAD (CONT'D)

Starboard thirty!

As the officer turns the joystick, Azad leaves.

EXT. STARBOARD BOW. LACONIA - MOMENTS LATER

As the ship swings round violently, the marines preparing for
action, Morris shouts the order to the GUNNER manning the aft
machine gun.

MORRIS
Engage the threat!

P.O.V. THE MACHINE GUN'S SIGHTS. - CONTINUOUS

The man with the missile launcher is seen finding his bearings and preparing to fire. Instead his chest explodes. The other men with him are also cut down.

EXT. STARBOARD BOW. LACONIA - CONTINUOUS

The marine ceases fire, Morris nodding approvingly. Azad comes rushing up.

AZAD
(to Morris)
The leader is the one in the green speedboat.

Morris understands. He nods.

P.O.V. STARBOARD BOW. LACONIA - CONTINUOUS

The numerous ships are closing in, the men firing wildly at the Laconia.

EXT. STARBOARD BOW. LACONIA - CONTINUOUS

MORRIS
(to his men)
Engage the green speedboat. Take it out.

Azad drops to the deck suddenly, holding his stomach. Morris turns to him but he signals for him to continue. The maddening din increases in volume as the marines open fire. CLOSE IN on Azad who is clearly in pain.

EXT. SPEEDBOAT. - CONTINUOUS

The chief pirate falls into the water, dead. The other men in the boat are panicking.

EXT. STARBOARD BOW. LACONIA - MOMENTS LATER

Azad cannot move. PETTY OFFICER OKEREKE (26) comes to his assistance.

OKEREKE

Sir?

At no reply from Azad he bends down and opens the captain's jacket. There is a lot of blood.

OKEREKE (CONT'D)

Sir, I'll get first aid.

He leaves quickly, Azad following him with his eyes.

P.O.V. LYNX COCKPIT. - CONTINUOUS

The guns on the Laconia are continuing to blast the pirate boats, which have foolishly all come too close. The marines are weaving amongst them on their two Rigid Inflatable Boats (RIBs). Some of the pirates are already surrendering.

EXT. STARBOARD BOW. LACONIA - CONTINUOUS

Okereke is getting Azad to hold a bandage to his stomach.

OKEREKE

Sir, you've got to stay awake. Sir.

AZAD

(weakly)

What's happening, Okereke? Did we get them?

OKEREKE

I think so, sir. They've started to surrender. The civilians should be safe now.

The GUNFIRE is continuing but it's much less now. There is a SUDDEN FLASH OF BRIGHT LIGHT off the bow and YELLS.

OKEREKE (CONT'D)

Sir, you've got to... Do excuse me, sir.

He smacks Azad hard on the face.

P.O.V. LYNX COCKPIT. - CONTINUOUS

The navy has taken control of the situation. Some pirates are escaping but most are standing in their boats, hands held high.

OBSERVER

(speaking on radio)

Kilo lima mike. This is zebra foxtrot tango. Report situation under control. Hostiles pacified. Over.

COMMAND (O.S.)

(on radio)

Kilo lima mike. Roger. ETA your location three zero minutes. Out.

EXT. STARBOARD BOW. LACONIA - MOMENTS LATER

The only sounds now are SHOUTS, THE HELICOPTER and THE SEA.

AZAD

It's a nice day, is it not, Okereke? A good day for swimming. I think. We all require some shore leave.

OKEREKE

Yes, sir, please focus, sir. Tell me about life in old Blighty. What do you like doing there? Do you like the footer?

There is little response from Azad.

OKEREKE (CONT'D)

How about walks in the countryside?

Again, not much there.

OKEREKE (CONT'D)

What about movies? Music? Girls, sir? What sort of girl do you like?

For the first time Azad smiles, though weakly. There is a light in his eyes.

AZAD

I like one who knows her own mind. One who is a little bit different...

FADE OUT:

EXT. THE HIGH STREET OF A SMALL COUNTRY TOWN. ENGLAND - AFTERNOON

TITLES as ANNE ELLIOT (28) walks down the street, carrying a wicker basket covered with a brightly-chequered cloth. She is wearing a long red skirt, walking boots and a jeans-jacket. There is

a brightness to her demeanour as well as her skirt and basket, blending perfectly with the bright colours of late summer/early autumn yet in strong contrast with the subdued tones and somnolent activities of others in the street. This contrast is heightened by her continually greeting people who hardly seem to know her.

ANNE

(to various
passers-by)

Good afternoon...A pleasant day, is it
not? How are you, Mr Smith? Etc.

She goes into an electrical shop, one belonging to a franchise.

INT. ELECTRICAL SHOP. HIGH STREET - CONTINUOUS

Anne enters and goes straight up to the counter where a SHOP ASSISTANT (18) is texting on her phone. Anne waits patiently, till the assistant finishes and looks with a bored expression at Anne.

SHOP ASSISTANT

Can I 'elp you?

ANNE

Good afternoon. I would like a USB
cable for a Technic Sony twin-deck.
Could you recommend one in particular?

SHOP ASSISTANT

I dunno. I just work 'ere.

ANNE

(only momentarily
fazed)

Well, I perceive there are some located
on the shelf behind you. Would you mind
if I examined one?

The assistant, gawking at Anne's manner, sleepily takes a cable down and hands it over to her. Anne examines it intently then passes it back.

ANNE (CONT'D)

I will take it, thank you.

She takes her purse out of her basket while the assistant rings it up on the register.

EXT. THE HIGH STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Anne emerges out of the shop and continues her way along the street as before, greeting people left right and centre. She makes her way out of the town and along a leafy lane, moving deeper into the countryside.

EXT. NUMEROUS LANES OUTSIDE THE TOWN - CONTINUOUS

She is now alone, making her way quietly surrounded by nature. The scene could be from a hundred years ago.

EXT. OUTSIDE KELLYNCH HALL GATES - CONTINUOUS

An ELDERLY MAN emerges from the gates on an old bicycle. He tips his hat to her.

E.MAN

Good day, Ms Elliot!

ANNE

Good afternoon to you, Mr Woodley!

He laughs merrily as he careers down the lane, sticking his legs out like a child. Anne, smiling, goes through the gate.

EXT. KELLYNCH HALL DRIVE - MOMENTS LATER

The Hall is grandiose, the grounds well-kept, with two Range Rovers in front, a Ford Mondeo and a Suzuki Jeep. Anne walks up to the front entrance and enters.

INT. ENTRANCE FOYER. KELLYNCH HALL - CONTINUOUS

It is a spacious hall with a few classical paintings on the walls and a faux-classical statue of a youth yearning for something beyond. There are a number of letters on the foyer table, some of which have been opened. Anne pauses to pick one of the opened ones up. It says 'FINAL DEMAND' and is from 'CHERRYBDIS DEBT COLLECTION AGENCY'. A shadow passes over her face. RAISED VOICES can now be heard from the drawing room. Wearily, she replaces the envelope, puts her basket down on the floor and heads towards the drawing room door.

INT. DRAWING ROOM. KELLYNCH HALL - CONTINUOUS

Anne enters to see MR SHEPHERD (50s, in a simple black suit and tie) and SIR WILLIAM ELLIOT (50s, in an expensive three-piece suit) standing and arguing, though it is the latter doing most

of the arguing. He is the only one who sees Anne but doesn't react to her presence. LYDIA ELLIOT, 23, sour and overly thin, is sitting on a couch avoiding the discussion by dividing her attentions between a little Scots terrier, QUEENIE, and a Nintendo. AUNT DAPHNE, a smart but casual woman with wind-swept hair, in her 50s, is standing, gazing out the window, and listening intently. Mr Shepherd is clutching a bunch of letters.

MR SHEPHERD

Sir William, I insist. As your solicitor - if you are not going to increase your income by renting Kellynch Hall -

Lydia shakes her head in disgust whilst still preening Queenie.

MR SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Then there are no two ways about it. You have to submit your income and expenditures to examination and agree to a voluntary repayment scheme.

SIR WILLIAM

I will not! I will not, I tell you, submit my personal life to examination by strangers, particularly those of the lower class.

MR SHEPHERD

I was a stranger to your family once, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM

(slightly taken aback)

That is an entirely different affair, Mr Shepherd. Yourself and...your daughter...are as close to us as...

He doesn't know what to say. He seeks to recollect himself by extracting a silver comb from his pocket and passing it through his hair as he looks into the mirror above the mantelpiece. Aunt Daphne meanwhile looks round to notice Anne in the doorway. Her eyes light up.

AUNT DAPHNE

Anne!

She strides across the room to embrace her lightly. Lydia looks up briefly then back to Queenie, before resuming her game.

AUNT DAPHNE (CONT'D)

I have not seen you...

ANNE

Since at least yesterday noon, aunt!

Aunt Daphne, still holding hands with Anne, turns to Sir William.

AUNT DAPHNE

Sir William, if you are willing to re-examine your expenses, Anne and I have taken the liberty to draw up a series of recommendations...

SIR WILLIAM

Anne? What has Anne got to do with this, Lady Palmer?

AUNT DAPHNE

But sir, if you do not wish to rent...

SIR WILLIAM

And have the world know our affairs by advertising in the local tabloid? I will not endure such a humiliation. We are Elliots.

MR SHEPHERD

We already have an interested party, Sir William. I have made some discreet inquiries. It is someone with whose family we have had slight acquaintance.

SIR WILLIAM

And who might this interested party be?

MR SHEPHERD

It is an Admiral Curtis, a retiree, and his wife.

Anne looks shocked. She exchanges a brief knowing look with Aunt Daphne.

ANNE

Excuse me.

She leaves. Only Aunt Daphne even notices.

SIR WILLIAM

An admiral? You astonish me, Mr Shepherd. Surely the navy is superfluous in this day and age. He can have no social standing of which to speak. What would they bring to this area? Sea shanties? The hosepipe? Tales of gigantic sea serpents and octopodes? Knot-tying classes...

As Sir William goes on, carried by delight in his own wit, Mr Shepherd turns to Aunt Daphne.

MR SHEPHERD

Where is Anne? I need some common sense in this equation.

AUNT DAPHNE

Do you not recall? Mrs Curtis is the aunt of Iman Azad, the young man who...

MR SHEPHERD

Won the heart of our fair Anne. Yes, I do remember the incident, but not why he abandoned her to join the navy.

SIR WILLIAM

Rum! Rum and 'pepsi cola'! Tobacco-stained spittle dripping down a beard fit for a caveman. Manners also fit for a caveman. The wife probably a bar maid who caught his roving eye during one of many bawdy bouts of shore leave. No education to speak of between the two of 'em, every other sentence ending with a preposition...

Sir William becomes aware of the others all looking at him, and he finishes his rant. He is almost embarrassed.

INT. ANNE'S ROOM. KELLYNCH HALL - LATER

Anne, headphones on, is standing over her twin decks. Behind her are stacks of vinyl records. It is a small room with a single bed and a desk, one wall with a well-stocked bookcase, the books ranging from English and Russian literature to biographies of classical and popular musicians. There is a maturity in the decor and arrangement, everything in place, even the records stacked neatly. One wall has a single poster of 2-Pac. Directly opposite is a poster of Aaliyah. Another wall has a framed contemporary painting of the English countryside. There are a few framed pictures on the desk and shelves of music greats like David Bowie, Jimi Hendrix, Pink Floyd and various Motown artists.

Anne is wrapt in her work, so much so that she doesn't notice a gentle KNOCKING on the door. It is only when the door opens and Aunt Daphne steps in and waves that she gets her attention. Anne notices her but hardly reacts other than to take her headphones off and cut the power to the decks.

She steps out from behind the decks and Aunt Daphne takes both her hands in hers.

AUNT DAPHNE

Anne...your father has reached a decision.

They both sit down, facing each other, on the edge of the bed.

AUNT DAPHNE (CONT'D)

He has agreed to rent Kellynch Hall to Admiral and Mrs Curtis.

(beat)

I know this is difficult for you, Anne...

ANNE

What advantage does Kellynch Hall offer the Admiral?

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM. KELLYNCH HALL. - EVENING