



Sway

Melanie Stanford

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She'd be happy to forget...if the past would just stop hitting "replay."

Ava Elliot never thought she'd become a couch surfer. But with a freshly minted-and worthless-degree from Julliard, and her dad squandering the family fortune, what choice does she have?

Living with her old high school friends, though, has its own drawbacks. Especially when her ex-fiancé Eric Wentworth drops back into her life. Eight years ago, she was too young, too scared of being poor, and too scared of her dad's disapproval. Dumping him was a big mistake.

In the most ironic of role reversals, Eric is rolling in musical success, and Ava's starting at the bottom to build her career. Worse, every song Eric sings is an arrow aimed straight for her regrets. One encounter, one song too many, and Ava can't go on like this. It's time to tell Eric the truth, and make a choice. Finally let go of the past, or risk her heart for a second chance with her first love. If he can forgive her...and she can forgive herself.

Warning: Contains an actor whose kisses taste like chocolate, a pianist with scores of regret, and a sexy crooner who just wants his ex to cry him a river.

Sway Details

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From Reader Review Sway for online ebook

Meredith (Austen-esque Reviews) says

Jane Austen's Persuasion Infused with Melody and Lyrics

In her debut novel, Melanie Stanford has creatively updated Jane Austen's Persuasion in modern-day California. The reincarnations and modernizations of these characters were very thoughtfully developed:

- Ava Elliot is a classical pianist who is just returning home after studying music at Julliard for eight years
- Walter Elliot is a former soap actor very concerned about maintaining his youthful good looks
- Beth Elliot is Ava's haughty older sister whom like her father, has had a habit of overspending
- The Elliots are retrenching to their Malibu home while renting Kellynch Mansion to some tenants
- The Crofts are a semi-retired couple that is well-off due to Richard Croft's career in music production
- Eric Wentworth, Sophia Croft's talented younger brother and Ava's former fiancé, is a huge success in the music world and just recently finished a big tour

Instead of the navy, Bath, and England, Melanie Stanford sets her story in the world of musicians, Hollywood, and actors. Some other clever reincarnations I was a big fan of was Charlie Musgrove as a video game tester (perfect job choice for him!) and Gage Johnson (William Elliot) as an aspiring actor and model. I also loved that Mrs. Smith became Lexi, a single mother who was Ava's closest friend from Julliard. My compliments to Melanie Stanford for finding so many ways to modernize and adapt these characters and situations that were not only clever but also wonderfully fitting.

One of the things I loved most about Sway was that it took place in the music world! To see characters express their emotions through songs and melodies, witness them turn to music in a time of pain, and see the selections of music that they play and listen to was a very lovely experience! I greatly enjoyed seeing references to Adele, Frank Sinatra, Chopin, and Hoobastank all mixed together! (Also, I think Melanie Stanford has great musical taste!)

Another aspect of the story I greatly enjoyed was the author's sensitive yet strong portrayal of Ava (Anne Elliot). Since Anne is such a quiet and selfless character, she is often depicted as meek, neglected, and a person to be pitied. I couldn't feel that with this version of Anne Elliot. Sure, she is heartbroken and mourns the loss of love between her and Eric, but she still attempts to make the best of her life and move on. I liked that she had a best friend in this story (Lexi), that she had another serious relationship post-Eric (Kaz), and that she becomes involved romantically with another man while Eric is in town. I especially enjoyed how instead of being a doormat or punching bag, she shows some backbone. When Eric openly displays his resentment with thinly veiled insults and digs, she throws him back a zinger or two. *slow clap for Ava* This makes her a character that not only earns our sympathy and understanding, but also one that readers can respect and admire as well.

Thoughtfully composed and beautifully executed, Sway is a lovely homage to Jane Austen's masterpiece. Filled with honest emotions, insightful parallels, and heart-aching lyrics this beautiful, often-sung song of second chances is definitely worthy of listening to and often replaying! Congrats to Melanie Stanford for a fantastic debut!

Sheila Majczan says

Oh, the romance, the poignancy and the bitter-sweet memories from eight years ago... This is a book I could not put down. You may think you know Jane Austen's story of Persuasion but even in looking for connections to her characters and to her events and outcomes you will find heart gripping scenes that pull you in and touch your emotions. (Yes, I had tears at times, again.) This author took this story and made it all her own – beautifully.

Some of my favorite parts are poignant memories of Ava's mom, songs Eric wrote: "Miss Me", "No Two Hearts" and his first single – "The song made him famous. And it was about us." "...Now we're strangers and it's killing me."

There is the obvious list of characters from canon: Ava/Anne, Beth/Elizabeth, Mari/Marilyn/Mary, Eric/Frederick, etc. But I loved some of the twists even in the names. Learn of how the names were chosen for each Elliot daughter. However some names are totally different even when their roles have obvious parallels, i.e. Gage Johnson/Leonard/William Elliot. The setting is modern day southern California.

I don't have to fill in the plot here. For JAFF readers much parallels canon: a rich family falls into debt and has to retrench, family duties are pushed on the middle child, their mansion is rented by the sister and brother-in-law of Ava's ex-fiance, and even in moving to another residence or taking a trip that ex shows up to bring all the memories and pain back.

The portrait of Eric was so attractive: there are comparisons painted to a modern Frank Sinatra, to another Michael Bubl  or even, Harry Connick, Jr. The words to the songs he has composed had me falling in love with this hero. (Well done, author.) As we read this through Ava's POV we can easily see as does her friend, Lexi, that Ava has not moved on. Even as we watch Eric doing so, and as in Persuasion, questioning whether he is getting his revenge, trying to make her jealous or is it the real thing? Ava believes it is real. But we also see Ava finally standing up for her own values and desires...not what her aunt or her father or her sisters expect.

As mentioned in another review there are moments that stay with you, "I heard you." Spoken by Eric when a group of family and acquaintances comes to a concert by the philharmonic in which she plays and comments are made as to how her piano part is not discernible above the other instruments. There are flashbacks of how the couple met, of how he was received by her family, of their sharing memories of lost loved ones and of how they fell in love, became engaged and broke up.

As I was reading this book I kept thinking, "Where does the title come in?" In canon it is right up front that Anne was "persuaded" by her friend and by her family but here the title's part in the story is saved, as in the "save the best for last" clich  and it has such power. Marvelous! Remember that LETTER, the letter? That also was a part I kept pondering, "How is that letter, when is that letter, going to be used?" You will not be disappointed. And again you will find it oh, so romantic.

This book is not only one you MUST read but it is also one that is one you must read a.s.a.p. Trust me.

Teresita says

A great modern adaptation

I loved this modern-day version of Persuasion, perfectly blended with today's lifestyle.

Highly enjoyable and entertaining. I really recommend it!

Carole (in Canada) says

My Rating: 4.5 Stars

This is a modern version of Jane Austen's 'Persuasion' that was so well written that it had me wanting to lock Ava (Anne Elliot) and Eric (Captain Wentworth) in the same room and not let them out until they resolved their issues! Others have written so eloquently of the premise of this debut novel that I know I cannot convey as well.

How does one 'get over' the love of your life even if you were only 19 years old? Yes, you move on but do you really 'live life'? Coming face-to-face with your lost love certainly causes many awkward moments. Having relatives that are oblivious to your pain doesn't help either. The secondary characters and love interest were well done...I actually found the 'love interest' creepy though. He was definitely a sleazier/needier version than William Elliot. I found this to be a realistic interpretation of Jane Austen's story based in contemporary times.

Using music as the theme of this story was inspirational and at times very moving. Then, of course, is the famous letter Captain Wentworth wrote in Jane Austen's classic book. You will have to read this wonderful novel to see how that is incorporated into the story...brilliant!

Mary says

Dear reader,

This was such a beautiful story-I simply adored it!

There were so many facets that I loved-the clever storyline,realistic characters,sheer romance,troubling angst,the title's meaning,creepy boyfriends, mixed messages.....relief when said messages were correctly interpreted!.....and the ending.....oh my!!!

If you're looking for a book with a modern twist on Austen's Persuasion,one that is utterly compelling and heartbreaking,
one in which you will happily find yourself reading until the wee hours of the morning,and yes,one that does contain that letter,then this,dear reader,is the one for you.

This book is a keeper,and as such,is highly recommend !

Debbie Brown says

Out of 5 stars, I would say this earns at least 6.

It's a lovely modern re-imagining of Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, though you don't have to have read *Persuasion* to appreciate the excellent writing here. The title is a perfect example of Ms. Stanford's thought-provoking style: "Sway" can be used as a synonym of persuade, but it's also something that you do when you're moving to music, which is a big part of this story. In the book itself, the prose is almost lyrical-sounding in places. Here's a small excerpt to illustrate my point:

"Getting sick of the piano was unthinkable. Music was the blood in my veins. Ever since Mom signed me up for my first lesson, my fingers tingled with songs unplayed. Later, when she died, it became an obsession. A release and a comfort. It was my connection to her, if only a thin one."

The author's dialogue all sounds natural and perfectly in tune with each character's personality. The story just flows along and carries the reader with it.

You can't help but sympathize with poor Ava, who's saddled with a ridiculously dysfunctional family that's hung up on wealth and celebrity while she is about as down-to-earth as you can get. Her younger sister, Mari, is a whining hypochondriac constantly begging for attention. She and her husband Charlie have a marriage that's looks to be on its way to a divorce court; he avoids her by constantly playing video games. Their two children are basically being raised by their nanny. Ava's father, Walter Elliot, and older sister Beth are both superficial snobs living in denial of their desperate financial situation. Her Aunt Rose's values are similar, though she's more level-headed.

Ava herself has been away from home for 8 years, having pursued an advanced degree at Julliard. Home hasn't felt like home since her mother died and left a hole in the family that's never been filled. It felt even less like home once she and her high school sweetheart, Eric Wentworth, had an acrimonious break-up after a brief engagement, torn apart by her family's censure of this nobody she would be lowering herself to marry.

That's all backstory, and the book moves on from there as Eric also returns to the neighborhood on a break from touring after having put together a highly successful band. At first Ava tries to convince herself that she's over him, but she's clearly not.

This book hit me with the same poignancy as the original, and I loved the way music was interwoven into the story. Actually, I loved everything about it. It's hard to believe this is a debut novel and I sure hope it's not the last one by Ms. Stanford.

Melanie Stanford says

Because I love *PERSUASION* by Jane Austen so much, I had to write my own retelling. :D

Kathy says

I'm a sucker for books like this. Well done other than a few questions which were left unanswered. Otherwise a great book that I enjoyed.

Content: fairly clean, no language, some talk of sex and mild innuendo but nothing graphic or on screen

Katie W says

I love modern re-tellings of great classics and this version of Jane Austen's *Persuasion* is no exception. I have a soft spot in my heart for music and this story has a firm basis in that area. Ava is a phenomenal pianist and her ex-fiance, Eric, is a modern crooner (think Frank Sinatra or Michael Buble) who has made it big. The similarities between this version and the classic are great, yet there are a few surprises. I loved the scene and the vivid characters, who are all larger than life. I couldn't help but think about how lucky Ava is to have had any time with such a great guy!

One thing that struck me with it being set as a contemporary story, is the fact that Eric is so mean and Ava is a sucker for being around him all of the time. She's ready to let the past stay in the past, but he just can't get over their breakup--eight years earlier. I think I'm a little harsher on modern stories because it's so very easy to relate to them, but I would have liked to see this couple have more favorable interactions with one another before deciding to take a second chance or not. Of course, that would probably change the story. :)

The misunderstandings, the realizations, the hope, the swoons, the music feels--they are all just incredible bonuses to a fun story and it's one that I definitely enjoyed.

Content: kissing; some innuendo. Clean!

Eliza Baum says

I'm in the middle of my yearly (bi-yearly? tri-yearly? who knows!) re-listen of *Persuasion*, and it put me in the mind to read one of the few adaptations that I've had in my queue for a while. I mostly read *P&P* stuff, but it's really a shame there isn't more variety of variations for this particular Austen work. This one came highly recommended, and I managed to catch it on sale recently, so it was a good candidate for this particular mood.

I was not disappointed and greatly enjoyed this story. Contemporary is not my favorite. That's not to say there aren't good ones, but I tend to enjoy fewer of the as a percentage of my reading list. For Austen adaptations, I think it takes some clever work to make the storylines translate, and this story did a pretty good job. There were a few things that bugged me, like the more "official" nature of the relationships of Eric/Lacey and Ava/Gage, but it would have been nearly impossible to avoid in a modern setting. I didn't love the way Eric acted early on, and I found it harder to buy the Lacey/Sam relationship. I don't count that against this story, per se, but it does illustrate one of the reasons I tend to prefer historicals.

I approved of the modern day translations of all of the characters, except perhaps that Shelby (Mrs. Clay) didn't seem to have the same level of purpose/motivation for existing. The story itself was at times a bit *too* closely translated, scene for scene, but there was enough that was unique to keep it from turning boring. My favorite parts, though, were the glimpses of Ava and Eric's relationship growing in the past, done through flashbacks. That, obviously, was not part of the source material, so it was partially the newness of it and partially how endearing they were. I love friends-to-lovers stories, and their friendship was adorable. (On a side note, I also loved that Ava and Charlie were best friends, too. It was a nice touch.)

Solid 4 stars, and I will likely re-read this one.

Christina says

Melanie Stanford's debut novel, "Sway," is a modern day tribute to Jane Austen's most thoughtful and undeniably emotive work, "Persuasion." Austen's masterpiece begins eight years after the broken engagement between the young heiress, Anne Elliot, and a junior naval officer, Frederick Wentworth--when he returns to her world and both must face the agonies of their shared history. "Sway" is set in southern California and flashes back to when Eric Wentworth and Ava Elliot were merely talented musicians in high school kids, falling in love over music and shared grief; soon after graduation the youths become engaged. But being so young and with such a promising future at renowned performing arts conservatory, the Juilliard School, in New York City, Ava's family forbids the match, and like in Austen's original, Ava breaks the engagement. Fast forward eight years, Ava returns to Southern California—her family now in danger of financial collapse (her father a past soap opera star with no gift for economy) must downsize. And by downsize, they rent out the family manse Kellynch and head to their beach house in Malibu. Ironically, Eric is no longer a starving singer/piano player but a successful musician with legions of fans—crooning hit lyrics about heartbreak and retribution—and his sister and semi-retired producer husband lease the Elliot's family home—bringing Eric back into Ava's life. Though Austen's original characters have been re-named and taken on a present-day restyling, they remain comfortably recognizable to any Austen groupie.

"Mari and Lacey continued to talk about Eric but 'Not Two Hearts' had started in my head, drowning them out. His song, his sweet voice singing those painful words played through my mind and I couldn't shake them loose.

'Once there were no two hearts so open
Once there were no two minds so alike
No feelings so in harmony
Now we're strangers and it's killing me...'"

Wrought full of bewitching tension, "Sway" thankfully follows true to the happily-ever-after this Austen aficionado expects. I admit, much of my appreciation was in recognizing the parallels. I also delighted in the pacing, likable characters, original lyrics with more than a nod to Austen's own words, use of contemporary pop culture, and all the music that is layered throughout. One need not have read "Persuasion" beforehand to revel in this novel. "Sway" can go Platinum all on its own! A must read in 2016.

Sophia says

One heartbreaking moment's decision broke up a pair of young lovers and for eight years they have gone their separate ways. Until now...

I love second chance romance if for no other reason than it allows for momentous mistakes to not do irrevocable damage. It also allows for 'right people wrong timing' to happen. In this tender and emotional retelling of Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, the author offers a modern retelling of a second chance romance set against the world of music and Hollywood. There are some heartbreaking moments, some humor, but a whole lot of healing and growing for the heroine, the hero, and the heroine's family. I found it compelling and read it through in nearly one sitting.

The story opens with Ava Elliot returning home to LA after spending eight years in NYC attending Juilliard. She is a good pianist and loves being part of an orchestra, but her real heart is toward teaching. She is bruised from not quite being good enough to make it into the music doctorate program and to have broken off a relationship that lasted three years. And now, when she returns home, she finds the family in flux. Her retired-actor father, Walter Elliot and her older sister, Beth, have blown through the family money and now

must downsize quickly. Goods are returned and some economies are made, but it isn't enough. The family home, Kellynch mansion, in the Hollywood hills must be rented out and the family move to the Malibu cottage.

Ava has never been close to her family since her mother's death. Her dad, her older sister, and her Aunt Rose all think highly of themselves and are pretty self-absorbed. Their snobbery and influence pressured Ava into the worst decision of her life and she can't forgive them. She was happily in love with a guy who had dreams, but no immediate prospects. She let her own fears and her family influence her to break off her engagement. She will not share a home with them and Beth's golddigger friend that now is living with the Elliots and has eyes on Ava's dad.

Now in an odd turn of events, she is the one with no immediate prospects and Eric is a star coming off yet another successful tour. It is his sister and her husband that will rent the family mansion. Ava chooses to stay with her younger sister, Mari and her husband Charlie while finding a job and then her own place. Life is dreary as she sees where her decision in the past has left her particularly when the successful Eric Wentworth returns to town, looks on her disdainfully and easily takes up with her brother in law's younger sister, Lacey.

Eva is set on picking up the pieces and happily enjoys the company of one of her oldest friends from school along with a new hot guy who seems really into her. She determines to show an indifferent face to Eric and the others, but deep down she slowly realizes that she never got over him, and worse, she wants him still.

Alright, so this was no light and easy romance. It is told entirely from Ava's perspective in the present and through flashbacks to show the foundations of friendship and love between Ava and Eric. She regrets and he is still angry and hurt so it is not easy. No, it was downright painful. Eric demonstrates that he is moving on and uninterested in Ava. She works hard to convince herself and others that its been eight years and its long over. Right. I confess to wanting to bop him a few times for cruelty and her for denial. Most of the book, the reader must sit back and wait for things to play out even while knowing full well that there is too much between this pair for them to move on with others thought that looks like exactly what they try to do.

The romance is only believable because the author took the time to establish the past between the pair and the hints a few times that all is not lost. Eric is bitter and angry and gets in a few licks against Ava as a result (and by that I mean that he says stuff- no violence). But there are enough poignant moments to give the reader hope that all is not what it seems with Eric's anger and then indifference. Truthfully, once stuff started coming out, it is easy to see that he is as much to blame as Ava for destroying a good thing. She might have ended it, but in his pain, he let her go and let her stay gone. As I noted earlier, this wasn't easy to read. This pair had/have their flaws, but they still love and get their second chance.

And to be clear, they both are dating other people, but there is no cheating going on though Ava does her fair share of wishing and hoping while dating Gage.

This story is a romance through and through, but it is also more. Ava has come full swing around to where she left. She wanted to prove that she learned from her mistakes. She had to prove that she could do things on her own and didn't have to use her family and their wealth as a crutch. She now starts to realize that though her family disappointed her that they are still her family and she will only heal if she deals with her anger from the past. There is also secondary stories of those around Ava who also need to grow like her sisters and her dad. And finally, she has to decide what she really wants and have the courage to go get it.

As to setting and backdrop, I loved the old Hollywood, the classic music, and especially the Jazz and Swing influence to the story. Eric has a band and he writes and sings retro like Michael Buble' or Harry Connick, Jr. Ava is a classical pianist and plays in a pops orchestra. Ava's dad was an actor who had enough talent to get in, but not quite to the top with Hollywood. These were fun things. It was also neat that the family through a party with Doris Day and Rock Hudson's Pillow Talk movie as their theme. I felt quite nostalgic and wanted

to pull out old movies and play old songs as a result.

The connections to the original story were there and easily recognizable both in the characters, events, and settings, but I loved that the author made the connections in a way that it was also its own story and not a weak copy of the original.

My only real niggle is that I would have loved to know what Eric was thinking and feeling a few times at crucial moments. I had a pretty good idea because of his actions, expressions, etc, but I want to know for certain.

Speaking of Eric, this guy had a lot of making up to do for his earlier jerk behavior. But wow, that song he wrote and sang for Ava had me weak at the knees and swoony. That and a few other actions went a long way to win me over. I was right there with Ava feeling all hearty and romantic as he sung and then made the grand gesture.

In summary, this was a hard-fought romance. I appreciated the layers to the story and attention to nuance and detail. The characters are well-developed as is the long-drawn out plot. The atmosphere and settings were perfect for this modern retelling. I would recommend this for those contemporary sweet romance lovers who don't want easy and who enjoy the feels in their romance.

My thanks to the author for providing a copy in exchange for an honest review.

Kathy * Bookworm Nation says

3.5

I'm always drawn to retellings of Austen's *Persuasion*, I guess I can't get enough at the whole second-chance-at-love storyline. I especially love a contemporary reboot like we find here in *Sway*.

Ava and Eric were high school sweethearts and what felt like soul mates. Like the original version, Ava's family interferes and the two part ways. The book picks up eight years later, Ava just returned from Julliard and Eric is the lead singer in a successful band. The book loosely follows the original, which is fun in a way since I love the original, but it also leaves little room for surprises. Despite the similarities, the author actually does a good job of making this her own and keeping the story fresh.

While I did enjoy the book, it kept me wanting to read, there were a few things I would have liked better. I wanted to feel more between Ava and Eric, one of my favorite things about these kind of plots is seeing the characters fall in love again. Ava and Eric spend a lot of time apart (most of the time Eric is pretty rude to her) and they're both dating others. I would have liked to see them together more, and not just in flashbacks. I'd have liked to see them in the present time relearning things about each other. Both obviously would have been through a lot in the past eight years and changed quite a bit from when they last knew each other as teenagers. So yeah, I liked them and liked their story, but would have liked to have seen them fall in love as adults.

Overall, I thought this was a fun debut and I'll keep a look out for more from Ms. Stanford.

Content

Romance: Clean

Language: None

Violence: None

Religious: None

Source: Amazon

This has been nominated for a 2016 Swoony Award. Share the love and vote for it here.

Sheila Majczan says

I posted a review for the Kindle edition of this book. I loved it all over again and found it hard to put down. Persuasion is my second favorite Jane Austen book. I love "that letter" as I am sure so do many others.

All the main characters are here but there are some differences as the story develops. Ava's father comes through in the end as to where his priorities lie. Even sister Beth in the end shows an attachment for more than just her father and designer clothes and furniture. While Eric Wentworth is not a Navy man he still has the successful career as did Frederick Wentworth in canon. Another difference is that William Elliot is now Gage Johnson and his part is even more dramatic in this story.

I loved the songs Eric wrote and/or sang, which Ava just "knew" were talking about their relationship. I had to pull several up on Youtube to listen to them while I was reading. Michael Bublé has always been a favorite of mine and it goes without saying that Frank Sinatra is way up there on so many lists. This author comparing Eric to those has to make it easy to hear Eric's voice in one's head.

This modern story follows the outline of Persuasion very closely. Ava (and Eric) being a musician is one of the major variations in the tale.

I will again say I urge all JAFF fans to read this story. I won a paperback copy as part of the grand prize for The Darcy Monologues blog tour raffle. I had read all the stores before but vowed to reread them since I now had the paperback versions in my hand.

Kirk says

I finished Sway a couple of hours ago and highly enjoyed it! This is a modern Persuasion set in California. Despite my puritan roots, the descriptions of the beaches/weather made jet right out there....especially with April snow on the way. While for most of the book I was in the 4ish rating...the ending pushes it to 4.5 or above(and I needed a happy ending. Tomorrow Austen in Boston is discussing Tess, the worse ending in the history of earth!!!! Lol, I've written an alternative ending in my head). This excellent and joyous ending was especially needed after my wild disappointment to the ending of Elizabeth Percer's "All Stories are Love Stories"....which also has a strong Persuasion theme in it...yet the key element of the ending of that book could not have been written by Jane Austen but by Edith "I never met an unhappy ending I didn't want to write" Wharton. Ava's(Anne Elliot) friend Lexi deserves her own book! I found the musical selections interesting too, although none of my favorites were mentioned. And some of Eric's(Captain Wentworth) friends and relatives were excellent minor characters too.

