

# Anna's Song

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## Arthur Oberg

She made me promise to write a real story this time, without the holes that could be held up to the light or the dark. She told me in her special way. In the way she patted dry the slices of eggplant after salting them to draw out the bitter tastes. In the way she let me make love to her. In the way we settled on a piece of Wedgwood or Imari. It was an arraignment, and an agreement. I called it Anna's song.

How many thank-you notes Anna wrote after the wedding, I never knew. What I remember were the last three we did together in our heads. One was for a pair of cocktail glasses that might have been for some later anniversary of glass—"How perfect," she (or, really, the two of us) wrote, "they are to the fit of the hand." The second had to manage a green, porcelain plate with red berries—"How it matched a luncheon cloth we loved." And the third—a carefully hedged thank-you for something to this day we can't name, and from a distant relative we never heard from again. For our own daughters, we would recommend, if marriages are still sung in twenty years' time, against sending calling cards to say they are at home.

We stood on different sides of the hedge or wall. When I wrote her a poem, I placed her sometimes on my own side to talk with her more easily as a woman and a wife. And then I put her on the other side to have her say things that really were more on my own mind. The house we lived in had views of the Olympics and the Cascades. We sat in chairs in the same room, made love in the bed we joked of as being always in the same place, beneath shutters I put together by hand, slat by single slat. Making love from different rooms was hard enough to handle in the movies. In our own life, I preferred our familiar bed. And I knew that Anna preferred it to other arrangements our friends talked about and, sometimes, confronted us with. *Their* rooms. *Their* bed. *Their* house.

I staked out our own corner of land and called it, in a tiny poem, “Anecdote of the North.” What mattered was that it was ours.

It was the telling that counted. And whether the analyst was smarter or dumber than the priest. Choices, again. And if choice was some terrible exclusion, I preferred it to living in the muzzy-fuzzy way of keeping everything semi-attractively open, or closed. In fact, I chose against analyst *and* priest. It was the one possibility I could make out of Anna’s song. If I misinterpreted, I lived with the danger and spent more time listening.

My daughter, five and an important half, stands in the tub, playfully running the washrag between her legs. Laughing at me with round, also brown eyes, the me, looking at my older daughter. When the children are in bed, Anna and I share the love seat. Its one spring is going; the other, gone. Its dyed purple fabric turning an unpleasant blue. We talk about the house, or the different house, three or four houses distant in time, from this house, when we will be alone. Now, we are more than a man and a woman in a house. We talk about what it means to be a man and a woman housed with two lovely daughters, with no sons who will have to go to the wars.

“Well, are you glad you got your son?” They were the first words my mother greeted my father with, when I was born. I have heard the story, since I was able to hear and see and talk full sentences, a hundred times a year. Face to face, by letter, and, breathily, over the long-distance phone. To this day, it is light-years away from the kind of thing Anna would ever think to say to me.

I have had so much wine that I have trouble finding the bed. One can’t get drunk on a shared bottle of vintage red, had with a five-course dinner cooked by a wife. But on this bottle I have, or am. Once, a bottle; now, a tale to be put down for the years. Anna tells me I am silly. She reminds me of the birthday card on which I called her Squirrel. I agreed to call her Kanga; she, to call me Roo. But Squirrel? Totally inappropriate. I can’t remember, even if my life depended on it. Anna swears it’s so. She is wrong about small things, but this strikes me not as small. I must be wrong. Anna helps me to bed and is still smiling in a way that touches me without offending me. Also, you must have guessed with me by now, part of Anna’s song.