



◆ ANNA'S HEAVEN ◆

Anna's mother has died. Anna's imagination leads her father and her onto a journey that, by the end, might just offer a certain sort of peace.

You can spell *kayak* forward or backward and it's the same word," Anna says. "Like *redder*."

"And *Anna*," Dad says. "Hurry up now or we'll be late."

Even though she is looking away, Anna notices that her father is restless. She can feel it in the air, in the grass, in the scar on her knee, in the mole on her neck, and in



every hair on her head. Anna knows that her dad gets restless when he is not looking forward to something.

There must be something in the air, because my hair is full of static,” Anna says, gazing up at the sky. “The clouds are in a hurry, just like you. When I close my eyes, I can see whatever I want.”

“Hurry up, Anna,” her father says, at that moment they hear the church bells chime from across the fjord.



Anna has all the time in the world.

“Look, Dad, this coffee pot and the elephant are from the same family!” she says. But he doesn’t answer.



Mom said birds were flowers that could fly, and that the sunflower was the sun's little sister," Anna says. "Look! Swallows are writing cursive letters in the sky. Maybe they're making shopping lists for us. And a recipe for strawberry tart." Anna follows two swallows with her fingers.



Today there's someone in the sky sending down nails. That's not right, is it?" Dad says.

"No," Anna whispers, "but tomorrow there might be strawberries with honey."

How can God keep his eye on everyone?" Anna asks.
Dad shrugs his shoulders.

"Was God better in the old days?" Anna scratches the mosquito bite on her calf.

"I don't know, Anna."

"Perhaps God's beginning to get forgetful like Grandma," Anna says.



Why can't he, who knows everything, who can pull and push and turnover clouds and waves and planets—why can't he invent something to turn bad into good?" Anna says.

"God should hang up a mailbox for people to send questions and complaints," Dad answers.

If only Mom could come back and braid my hair," Anna sighs.

"Ah, if only she could," Dad says.

"One day while Mom was brushing her hair in front of the mirror, she said everything had two sides." Anna gives that some thought. "Do you think there's anything on the other side of the mirror?"

"I don't know, Anna, my sweet," Dad says, squeezing his eyes shut.



Look, Dad! There's a hole in the sky. Come on, let's jump!"

"Where are we going, Anna?"

"Far away, Dad. We're going to swim to the Mariana Trench, and then we'll fly through the Crab Nebula to a place where the sky is under water."

"Oh, right," Dad says, but he doesn't really understand. He hesitates, but then he jumps after her.

"We'll follow the flying fish. They must know the way," Anna says.



Listen! The sea has so many voices," Anna whispers. "It sounds like a heavenly choir humming. A song about crabs, eels, and sea urchins cooing in the deep."

Can you fish for mackerel in heaven?" Anna asks. "And sleep in on Sundays?"

"I think you can take your socks off whenever you please, at any rate," Dad answers.

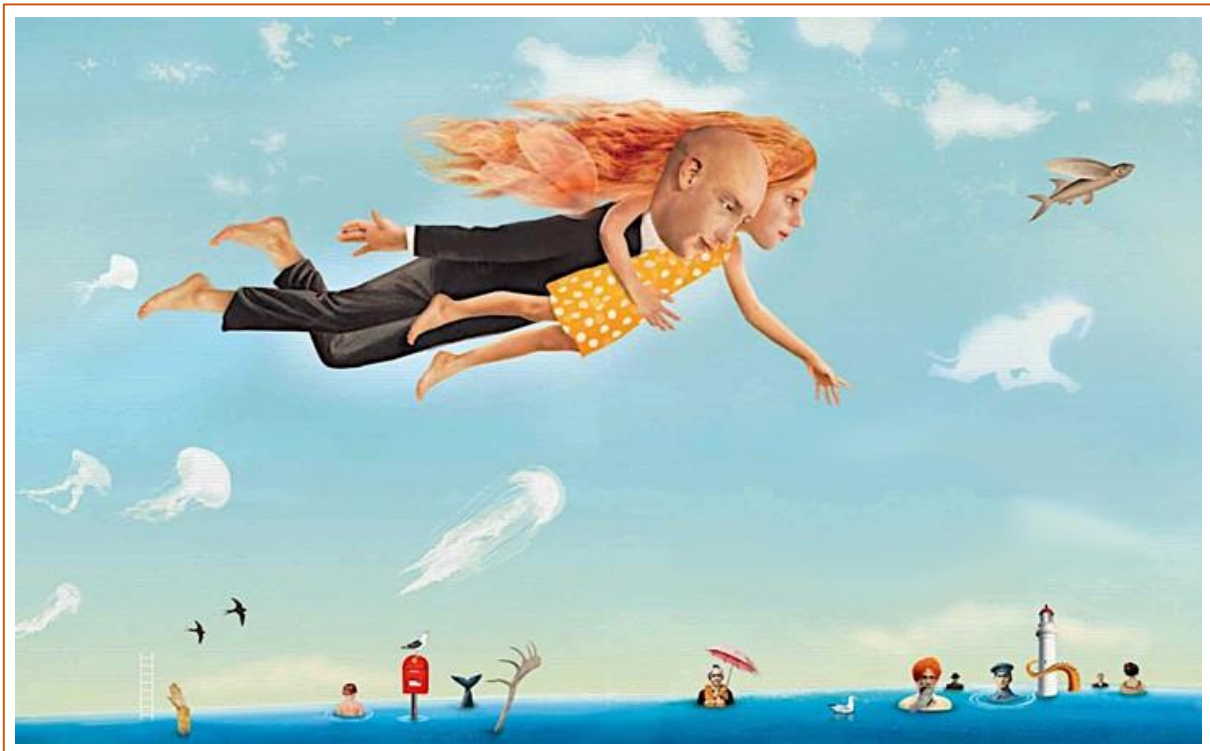


“Like the President of the United States does,” Anna says.

“If you’ve got to look after everyone, you must have more arms than an octopus—and longer ones, too,” she adds.

Here are all the people we can’t see, Dad. Grandad is down to the left of the lighthouse, rocking in his chair as always. There. I can see the old postman. Mom said he read people’s letters,” Anna says.

“Now and then some letters do disappear along the way,” Dad answers.



I can’t see Mom anywhere,” Anna says.

“Perhaps she’s in Paradise, doing some weeding. God would be pleased to have a gardener. He might need a hand with the garden if he’s got so much else on his mind.”

“Or she’s visiting someone she hasn’t seen for a while,” Anna says. “I bet she’s wearing her new dress, the one from Spain.”

Mom might have gone to the library,” Anna suggests.

“Does God read books?” Dad exclaims in surprise.

“Of course he does. He’s got a big library. Even God needs an encyclopedia to look things up now and then.”

“It can’t be easy for him to remember everything,” Dad says.



These are places I’ve never been before,” Dad says. “I’m glad you brought me. But how do we get home?”

“We’ll do what cats do when they fall from the ninth floor—twirl around and land on our feet!” Anna answers.

At last, Dad smiles.



“Now I’m ready. Hurry up, Dad. We’ve got to go or we’ll be late.”

Stian Hole
Anna’s Heaven
Cambridge, Eerdmans Books, 2014