



"A literary demonstration of power, so elegant and riveting, a clean display of dramaturgy and the art of prose ... a great caress of a novel."

Adresseavisen



"The novel's strength lies in Emanuelson's courage to analyze the really big emotions and his ability to do this without being ridiculous."

Dagens Næringsliv

"*Anna and Love* is eloquent, beautiful, sorrowful and original in its own way; this ordinary woman's life that holds so many secrets."

Dagbladet

"Emanuelson has created a credible psychological portrait of insecurity, loneliness and vulnerability. The book is responsive, painful and warm at the same time."

Fædrelandsvennen

"Birger Emanuelson draws a precise and heartfelt portrait of a strong woman. It is the largest feelings that are held up as a prism towards the sun and the colors are crisp and clear."

Vårt Land

ANNA BERGSENG is a midwife who never took a sick day in her life. She is the safe haven, the veteran, one for the young colleagues to look up to. One evening shift she goes to work with a fever. In the hospital corridor she suddenly faces a person she once knew, and a flow of memories moves the ground beneath her feet.

Anna and Love is a story of hope and change. About life as it was, and about life as it could have been. Is it ever to late to forgive oneself?

BIRGER EMANUELSEN made his debut in 2012 with *For Thine is the Kingdom*, a collection of short stories. In 2014, the novel *Blood is crying from the ground*, earned him Sørlandets Literary Award and The Youth Critics Award. *Anna and Love* is Emanuelsons third novel.

PHOTO: ANDRÉ LØYNING



Birger Emanuelsen

Anna and Love

An excerpt translated by Nadia Christensen

If you ask your father about the oldest occupation, he becomes quiet and reserved. If you ask your mother, she replies with pride. Her answer is self-evident. It's mentioned already in the Bible's first breath. Which should not be surprising, because this woman is so closely connected with existence itself that every culture on earth has wanted to grant her eternal life. So she sings to us from myths and sagas, frescos and cave paintings. She is mentioned together with kings and generals, with poets and explorers. Rulers around the world have been drawn toward her, just as they have been drawn toward death. They have begged and pleaded for her to enter their most private rooms, and then the next day wanted to burn her on a pyre as a witch. Perhaps it's true as has been said: That farmers and laborers created the human chain with which we drew the buckets from the well. That it was they who let us drink. Yet, if you ask your mother, she knows. It was this first woman, and her sisters, who forged the links between generations.

From *The Art of Midwifery* by Tori Lima

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Part I

The water would wash her clean. The skin on her fingers, her nails, everything that was constantly touched by well-used instruments, by colleagues and patients, by all their small, unthinking movements. Anna let the cold water run before she turned off the faucet and went to stand in the doorway. The red light still glowed above the delivery room. Soon it would start blinking, and then she would walk down the corridor, past the green-and-yellow floral design on the plastic tablecloth, past the bulletin board with all its notices, and through the heavy door. In the delivery room yet another child would be born. The mother, still terrified by what her body had gone through, would break into hot tears when a fully-formed human being was placed on her anxious breast. The father would already have risen from the red easy chair in the corner that was so close to the radiator he'd laid his hand on it several times trying to sense what his wife was experiencing; he would hold her and say something about what had just happened. Anna could still be moved by it. Life's prosaic beginning did not become routine, the way death sometimes did.

She scratched the back of her hand. Using so much soap wasn't good for her skin. Jorunn had asked her to use gloves, as the others did, but still, whenever possible, she didn't use them. They created a distance. After she learned how good it could feel to be touched, how much warmth one person could transmit to another simply through the surface, having to pulling on a protective membrane seemed ridiculous.

“Have you heard anything?”

Anna shook her head, but didn't turn around.

Ida came and stood beside her.

“They'll probably ring for you soon,” she said.

The two women stood there gazing at the red light above the door.

“It’s twins.”

This time Anna nodded.

“But the father isn’t here,” Ida continued. “He didn’t come.”

“I see.”

Anna turned toward Ida.

“Twins can come early,” she said.

Ida did not reply. She took a step into the corridor, looked first to the right, then to the left, toward the old smoking balcony, and then moved back into the doorway beside Anna.

“Can you imagine—having to give birth alone?” she asked.

Anna smiled. “Don’t forget, I’m a little older than you.”

“I didn’t mean it like that,” Ida said quickly.

Anna felt a warm rush of emotion. She wanted to say it didn’t matter, each person had to live in her own time, but that would have been too much. There was no need to give rise to these thoughts.

“Malvin didn’t even know I was in labor,” she said instead.

The red light was still glowing—in anticipation now, it seemed to her.

“Besides, she isn’t actually alone.”

“True,” Ida said with a sigh, and went back into the break room. “I’ll heat some water for tea.”

“Thanks,” said Anna. This time she was careful to turn around and smile.

Ida stood by the tea kettle, gathered her hair into a ponytail, and Anna could see the ceiling light’s oblong reflection in her large eyes.

“You’re not standing there feeling sorry for me, are you?” Anna asked.

Ida shook her head, the little ponytail bobbed behind her. But at the same time, she pressed her lips tightly together.

“Oh my dear girl,” said Anna, turning back toward the corridor.

Not a single day passed that they didn’t remind her of it.

The room grew quiet, except for the sound of the water heating in the kettle. It soon reached boiling, and she could hear the cupboard doors being opened, one after another. Ida had formed a nodding acquaintance with the management already her first week on the job, but she still hadn't learned where the tea bags were kept.

Anna's hand started to itch again. She put it in her pocket. Once found, compassion was impossible to escape.

"I was thinking about what it was like for you," said Ida, coming to stand beside Anna again.

Anna took the warm beverage, shook her head, and held the cup against her stomach. What began as a caress soon began to burn inside the thick material. She certainly should be grateful. Nonetheless, she wanted to get away from this solicitousness, from these lovely, sad eyes. Whenever people thought they could understand her life, Anna lost sight of it herself. Those who said they understood what had happened to her, understood it with their feelings and words, with their own hearts and minds. And in all this understanding, in everything Anna had to accept, she gradually lost the person she was.

Anna pointed at the red glow without turning around, felt how the light in the corridor stung her eyes.

"It's been going on for a long time now," she said.

Ida cleared her throat from within her teacup, as if she had hidden herself in the hot water.

"Jorunn knows what she's doing," she said.

Anna nodded.

"Are there any others tonight?"

"A young couple arrived just before you came on duty, but I sent them home again. She was barely dilated. Was just afraid, I think. But they might come back, because I said there was room for her if she wanted to stay overnight."

Anna sighed. "We're not supposed to say that anymore."

"Says who?" Ida asked arrogantly.

Anna raised her eyebrows.

Ida did not give up. “Sometimes I can tell you’re older than me. That enormous respect you have for Gerd.”

“It’s not a matter of respect,” Anna began, but she felt worn out, unable to continue.

“So,” Ida interrupted, “just because she’s in charge of the ward, we have to do exactly as she says. It was the same thing when we were asked to work extra weekends. Nobody else said a word.”

If Anna felt lonesome, it had nothing to do with how many people touched her on the outside. No, she dreamed of meeting someone who fought past this exterior, who broke through to the inside where her true self existed. Where neither voices nor fingernails could reach.

“You don’t say,” she said at last.

“Yes,” said Ida.

“Yes, yes,” Anna repeated, and took a large gulp of tea. “You young people probably know best.”

Ida laughed again, now somewhat resigned. “But we shouldn’t swallow everything,” she said.

“No, of course not,” Anna replied.

“In fact, we’re the ones who know how to do this job,” Ida added.

Anna agreed with her about that at least. Actually, she liked this side of Ida—her ability to get involved in the least thing, and the way her body could never hide that fact. Perhaps she could say she appreciated what Ida had done, because she did appreciate it. It was Ida who had demanded additional fulltime positions, who sat down with Gerd and the leadership when job pressure was wearing out some of the younger workers who didn’t know how to manage their time and energy. However, it was a double-edged sword. Because this was a job for people who liked to work. You had to learn to say no, but you also had to learn to say yes. Yes, we’ll take care of that. Yes, we’ll figure this out. Yes, my dear, he’ll survive. She looked at Ida again. It was impossible to dislike her

young colleague's spirit. Still, she wished Ida would feel equally enthusiastic about the work they had to do.

When the young people first arrived, they thought saving lives that otherwise would be lost was all that mattered. It might take them years to realize that meaningfulness could lie somewhere else—that it lay hidden in the small tasks initially called routines, work they thought they already knew how to do.

The door to the delivery room opened, and a woman about the same age as Anna came out into the corridor. Anna raised her hand and waved, but the woman went straight to the food cart, filled a white plastic cup with red fruit drink, swallowed it quickly, and refilled the cup. After gulping down the liquid again, she crushed the plastic cup and clutched the cart.

It looked as if she were praying.

“Is everything going all right in there?” Ida called out.

The woman gave a start, then turned with a smile.

“Oh yes. She's so brave,” the woman said. Her face was pale and drawn. “But it takes time.” She turned back to the cart and filled another cup with fruit drink. It looked like she was going to keep standing there, but then she turned to face them.

“I didn't think I could do it again,” she said.

Ida laughed. “Well, you've certainly done your part,” she said, raising her teacup in a toast.

The woman didn't say anything, but she raised her plastic cup too; her whole expression softened as they toasted each other. This all came so naturally to Ida.

The woman went on: “I've been at it for fourteen hours, but it feels as if I just got her. And to think she's lying in there giving birth by herself.”

Suddenly the woman grew hectic again; she emptied her cup, and hurried to the door. As it shut behind her, Anna looked at the clock hanging above the bulletin board.

“Are you off-duty now?” she asked Ida.

Ida pulled out her cell phone and checked the time for herself. “Yes, but I’ll stay around for an hour or two. We’ve got another meeting with the administration next week, and I want to be prepared. Everyone here thinks we should be allowed to keep the maternity ward, but honestly, I have to say it’s hard to know what to think.”

Anna nodded. “But the maternity ward has always been here, hasn’t it?” she began.

Ida turned to her, breathing rapidly. Sensing a new lecture coming, Anna raised a hand in front of her. Ida had a better understanding of what they should think. After only a few months on the job, she had gone straight to the hospital administration, by-passing Gerd, and demanded that one of the doctors, Gundersen, be shifted out of the delivery room. She had gathered statements from her colleagues, and had the union’s support. It did not take long before she got what she wanted.

Anna admired Ida for that. Not just because Ida got rid of an old colleague who was rude to the patients, but the way she did it. Her natural confidence. She was so sure about everything, and after seeing this confidence Anna began to miss something she’d never had, something that now for the first time, this past year, she’d discovered she lacked.

Perhaps it was courage.

“In any case, it will probably be after my time,” she said.

Ida turned away, her breathing calmer now. “Don’t say that,” she objected. “You’ll see, you won’t stop until you drop.”

Anna laughed.

“I wouldn’t mind that.”

Ida laid a hand on her shoulder. It felt so good to be touched.

“I believe you,” Ida said, then turned and went back into the break room.

Anna leaned against the doorframe, felt how heavy her body was. She glanced down into her cup. A dark, bullion-like liquid had gathered around the tea bag, and she closed her

eyes as she swallowed the cold, acrid drink. She was about to go over to set the cup on the counter when she heard a loud noise in the hall. It was the automatic doors opening, but not the way they should. Someone pressed open the mechanism, in effect broke in. She was going to call Ida, but felt curious and leaned out the doorway to look. A young man in an open jacket came running down the corridor. She scarcely had time to think before he was in front of her.

“Elisabeth . . . Elisabeth Sand, where is she?”

Anna stiffened. All she could see were his lips moving, and the expression on his face, how much he resembled someone.

“Hello,” he said, and though he didn’t shout, he spoke rapidly, incoherently. “Can you help me? She’s having a baby, it’s my wife.”

Anna continued to stare at him, tried to make her brain cooperate, say who he was.

The young man took a step forward, waved his hand in front of her face.

“She’s having a baby,” he repeated, but Anna still didn’t answer, couldn’t make things fit together.

“Do you know someone here?” she asked instead. As she saw his eyes narrow and realized the man was at the breaking point, a voice broke through the fog in her head.

“We didn’t think you were coming,” Ida said briskly. “She’s in room 206, straight ahead under the red light.”

“Thanks,” said the man, and ran toward the door without waiting for a reply.

Ida shook her by the shoulders. “Anna, are you there?”

“I know him,” said Anna. “I knew him.”

Ida’s hand was still on her shoulder.

“Are you feeling all right?” she asked, placing a hand on Anna’s forehead then back on her shoulder.

“You’re very warm.”

Anna shook her head. “No, no,” she protested.

At that moment the red light began to blink. Ida took her hand from Anna's shoulder, but Anna held her back.

“Anna, you have to go now,” Ida said carefully. “Jorunn needs you in there.”

They heard someone tear open the door to the delivery room; the young man shouted something to them. But Anna didn't move. She felt Ida's warmth sink into her, had already closed her eyes.

“Don't let go of me,” she said. “Don't let go of me again.”

2.

The long year began like this: Anna had promised Malvin that she'd take it easy, was just going to make a quick trip to the library to clarify a reference. When her water broke, she felt people were watching her, although there was no one on the grassy expanse near the college campus. Fortunately, pain took over and left her free to do what her body required. She turned around and went back to the apartment to contact Malvin; it was only on her way up the stairs that she had to sit down. Nils Olav Andersen, who like Malvin was trying to get established at the institute, was on his way out to attend a department meeting. When he finally understood the situation, he was so deeply affected by his accidental role in it that he helped her into his car and drove her to the hospital. They didn't say anything to each other, but she could tell he liked speeding along the narrow roads. When they got to the maternity ward the birth was progressing so rapidly she had to lie down on the floor in the reception area. One of the nurses tried to get hold of Malvin, but he was in a meeting, and the young woman who answered the telephone was too shy to tell him what was happening. Malvin was not alerted until Nils Olav Andersen personally found him at the office, more than an hour later. By that time Ragnar's 51 centimeters and 3611 grams had already been recorded on the birth certificate.

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