

SHE ROWED AFTER THE RAINBOW (HON, SUM RÓÐI EFTIR ÆLABOGANUM)

Summary

This novel reads almost like a collection of short stories. Every second chapter works as a stand-alone narrative connected through Argantael, who has just decided to drown herself. The novel is a literary take on composer Edward Elgar's Op. 36 known as the Enigma Variations and follows the structure of the compositions. The title of each variation heads a new chapter, which is each dedicated to a different person, just like Elgar's variations.

1 Andante - Torn: The book opens with Argantael down by a little dock tearing up the diary that has been her companion since she was a little girl. She lets the pages whirl into the night and the choppy fjord.

"... She is tearing randomly from the book, aged 7 miserable, aged 15 miserable, aged 9 miserable. Had she ever been happy or had she only written when she wasn't?"

2 L'istesso tempo – Shackles: Argantael is 9 years old and overhears her father telling his brother about his failed marriage. Argantael's mother is pathologically jealous, probably has a narcissistic personality disorder and repeatedly tries to kill herself. The parents are tied by each other. The father thinks that if he leaves his wife, she will finally succeed and the mother resents owing him her life. Neither of them manages to love their daughter. He has given up, doesn't think he is any good with children and buries himself in a high-flying banking career. She is utterly incapable of loving others, though she does keep up the practical appearances.

3 Allegro – Two Steps to the Left: Argantael is still by the dock. She has been considering throwing rocks at her boyfriend's boat; after all he cares more for it than for her. She loves Dagan, though she doesn't quite understand him, maybe because he is 23 and she is 16. Maybe she should really be in love with Sebastian, they would be much more compatible and he is her best friend.

4 Allegretto – Switch Off!: A couple of months ago Argantael met Dagan at a party her older cousin threw, everyone there was older. They drank and danced, she didn't. Then this man asked her to dance. She refused, it would only dredge up memories of dance school – her mother had insisted, Argantael never got the hang of it.

But somehow Dagan manages to get her to switch off and give in to the music and the movements. The moment and the man enthralled her. Completely taken aback by her own feelings, she ran all the way home.

A few days later she agrees to a date and goes back to his place.

5 Allegro di molto – One Step Forward: Back at the dock she suddenly figures out how she is going to kill herself. She has already ruled out jumping in here, she is too strong a swimmer. So she gets into the boat and starts rowing seawards through the fjord.

“I’ll row out beyond the bridge, or as far as I can manage, then I’ll throw the oars overboard and let go. The wind will take me to sea, it’s blowing straight towards the horizon. Sooner or later Katalina will capsize, by then not even the most powerful of survival instincts would save me...”

6 Moderato – Leper: Argantael’s mother, Eugenia, hangs herself in their home.

And when Argantael returns to school nobody knows how to react or even talk to her, not the teachers, not her friends, and she grows isolated. She feels like a banished leper. Not that she is grieving her mother, no, she is furious with her mother for having done this to her, for taking her life, her friends, her youth away.

7 Andantino – Wounds: Argantael is rowing through the stormy night. She remembers her grandmother, who cared about her, for real, until the years erased any trace of a granddaughter from her mind.

Moments with her mother, or rather without her, come back too. That time when she had a solo at the big concert hall and waited and waited for her mother to join the audience. She had waited afterwards too, outside in the snowstorm, to no avail either. Had she been 11 or 12? And then, that instant when she understood that her mother had forgotten her in the park, and she would have to find her own way home. She was 3.

8 Presto – The Rite of Spring: Argantael falls asleep in the boat and dreams that she is lying in a hammock at her grandmother’s idyllic cottage, before she suddenly finds herself at a party with all her best friends. And a stranger so beautiful that she transfixes all the guests, and then entices Argantael to follow her into a cave. She wakes up, moaning.

9 Allegretto – Set Sails: Argantael wishes the boat would have capsized while she slept. Her thoughts stray to Dagan and their moments at sea, which

only made the differences between them starker. Dagan, enjoying the quiet with nothing happening, and her going crazy because nothing is happening when all she wants is him. Suddenly the friends she has not seen since her mother died and she fled into Dagan's arms come into focus.

- 10 **Adagio – The Match Girl:** A diary excerpt about her friend Ena, who has an unparalleled appetite for life and follows Argantael around like a stray puppy. Argantael presumes that, as usual, all her toys are the reason why. But after a visit to Ena's house she realises how much they have in common. They both have violent parents. Ena's father abuses his wife and children, while Argantael's mother aims the physical violence at herself.

Ena once says:

"... how easy wouldn't it be to cut someone's throat?"

Argantael! Have you ever thought about it? Just how easy it is to kill someone? It hardly takes any effort! The main artery in your neck is totally exposed, did you know that? All it takes is a nick, and the blood will gush out! Lifeblood! You'd die on the spot.

.... Argantael, I'm scared of the kitchen now, when that mood comes over him. I can't face being in the same room as that knife!"

- 11 **Intermezzo: Allegretto – October Sun:** Argantael pulls harder on the oars, she is trying to stem the images, trying to forget, but she can't keep them out, her friends and Sebastian.
- 12 **Allegro di molto – Repetitions:** Argantael receives a letter from Sebastian. They have only seen each other at school since her mother died. She is avoiding him, her best friend, who is like a brother, or was before the accident. Sebastian writes that his father committed suicide too. Sebastian was 10 and they were very close. It had only gotten easier to deal with, when he had moved here and made new friends, so he had never brought it up, not even with his best friend.

Argantael never replies.

- 13 **Andante – Breakers:** The boat is far from the shore and she dares to think. *"What would have happened right after the accident, if Dagan hadn't been there? Would she have done what she decided last night right then? Did he maybe actually save her life then, just by being there?"*
- ... Why has she never thought about these things before? She feels as though she*

has been walking around with a thundercloud inside all this time, such volcanic fury that only making love or having a row has felt like real emotion, everything else has been too diluted, friendly chitchat, the quiet fjord, normal friendship, it has all felt like cotton wool or duvets.”

She allows her mind to touch on another big change in her life, the incredibly electrically alive Morgana, Dagan’s stepsister, who has filled her life with unsettling feelings.

“... Morgana is a whirlwind. Morgana is a bouncy ball slammed into the concrete that bounces up to the sky, before coming lazily down again. Morgana is a crashing wave, boiling and sluggish at the same time. She does everything quickly at an incredibly calm pace...”

Argantael decides to row back.

- 14 **Romanza – The Girl with the Butterfly on her Back:** The story about Morgana, who will loom far too large in Argantael’s life. She is fascinated by her, mesmerised and refuses to admit that she is in love. She loves both Morgana and Dagan, but suspects that they are more than just stepsiblings.

Morgana persuades Argantael and Dagan to come to a rave in a mountain cave. All Argantael wants is to be with Morgana, but through the throbbing masses she glimpses Morgan and Dagan kiss and takes off towards the train tracks. She intends to throw herself on them, but Sebastian catches her just in time. Later that same night Argantael heads to the dock with her diary.

- 15 **Allegro Presto – She Rowed After the Rainbow:** It dawns on Argantael that she is in charge. Free to love whomever she wants, and why only one person, when there are so many different loves? Argantael changes course, back towards the shore, towards the other leg of the rainbow hovering right over her grandmother’s cottage.

“Don’t look back... Not until you reach the treasure... Who would have thought that I would ever really find the gold at the end of the rainbow?”

Row Argantael!!! There is a long way to go, the wind has risen, the currents are pulling away from land. Row!!!”