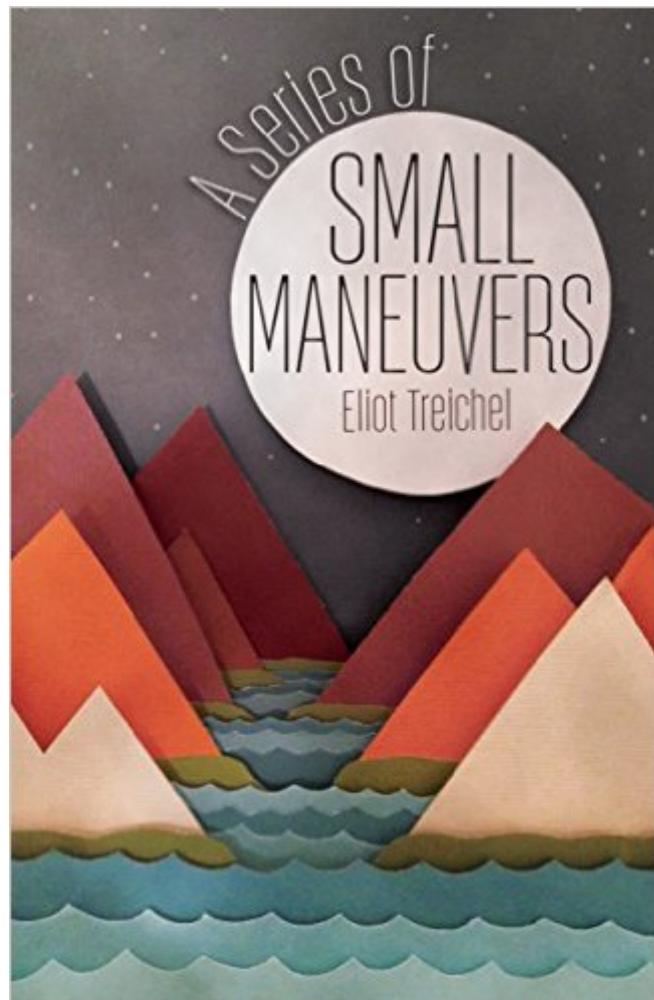


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A Series Of Small Maneuvers



Synopsis

For 15-year-old Emma Wilson, everything is changing. Uncomfortable at home and in school, Emma's growing up, and feels isolated from her friends and family. Things go from bad to unfathomably worse when Emma inadvertently causes an accident that kills her increasingly distant father on a spring break canoe trip meant to bring them closer together. Suddenly, Emma's efforts to reconcile with her father as a parent and a person have to happen without him, and she must confront her guilt and her grief to begin moving forward. With the help of river rats, ranch hands, and her horse, Magic, Emma finds strength in herself as she and her family navigate their reentry into a normal life.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars (See all reviews) (24 customer reviews)

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Age Range: 12 - 18 years

Grade Level: 7 - 12

Customer Reviews

This book accomplishes the feat of balancing really human, realistic characters with suspenseful, intense action. As an adult reading this book, I didn't feel left out at all. Quite the contrary; Treichel's adult characters, even when seen through teenage Emma's eyes, are extremely easy to connect to and sympathize with. Watching Emma's mother deal with her grief, from Emma's point of view, let me fill in the blanks about how she was feeling. Emma is also a great character and one that I haven't seen a lot of lately. I've become accustomed to the precocious, improbably brainy teenager as a protagonist. Emma is a highly-skilled survivalist while still approaching her life the way a

"normal" teenager would. I'd advise you to read this in public at your own risk. The accident that takes out Emma's father isn't a brief moment, but a long, drawn out emotional experience. It was apparent what was coming, but going through the traumatizing experience of witnessing his final several hours makes the reader feel powerless and I, personally, had to put it down so I wouldn't ugly-cry in public. This is a good book for outdoors enthusiasts (some of that stuff went over my head), but it's approachable for people in all different phases of life .

A Series of Small Maneuvers is a novel by Eliot Treichel told in the first person voice of 15 year old Emma, who is on an off-the-grid canoe adventure with her father when he dies of a fall. Emma has to make her way back to civilization in more ways than one. This is one of those books I just fell into and could not get out of until I reached the end. It goes on my mental bookshelf between *A River Runs Through It* and *The Sky Fisherman*, two other young people, death, and river books that pull the reader out into the main current and just will not let go. What astonishes me about Treichel's book is that I just found out it is classified as a Children's or Young Adult novel. I see no other reason for this than that the protagonist is a 15 year old girl, because the vocabulary, sophisticated back-and-forth, in-and-out time structure, and certainly the theme of learning to go on in the face of a tragic accident, all seem very adult and very engrossing to me. Treichel's protagonist, Emma Wilson, is written in a pitch perfect voice. She has plenty of the attitude and ennui that media, at least, would lead us to believe is how young girls behave and talk, but she has not totally resisted the gifts of character her father Parker has bequeathed her. She's a more interesting character for her ability to remember him in very specific ways. And everything she remembers seems to have big life meanings echoing through them. In the scene that gives the book its title, Emma thinks about a big set of rapids ahead of her that need to be run and remembers what Parker would have made of it: "He would have turned the big rapid into something doable, something orderly and reasonable. It was just a series of small maneuvers that would add up to something larger. That's how you had to view it." That idea of accreting moments could also stand for the structure of the novel. It is a series of mini-scenes that like the rivulets eventually coming together to be a river compound together to make the whole story. Parker, the dad, was a river guide who had become a soils engineer. Going with the River of Life metaphor, he was Emma's river guide and obviously is going to continue to be for the rest of her life. Emma says, "My dad sometimes told me how he thought the word river should also be a verb. To river was to act with grace, to bend, to flow. A balance between power and gentleness, depth and shallows. It was to dance. To catch the light of the sun." Did the world actually

need another coming-of-age-plus-river themed book? Absolutely. It is a complete joy to me to stack up three endings from three river / death / life / coming-of-age books. Here is Culver at the final moments of Craig Lesley's The Sky Fisherman, the action of which takes place on Oregon's Lost River (aka the Deschutes), where Culver goes after the death of his father in a fishing accident. "Now I am finished casting. No twilight remains. Quick clouds of breath rise toward the night sky. I disturb the river with my hand. Reflected stars dance. Thrusting my head back, I gaze at the countless stars. I stare and stare and stare until my balance falls away. Tasting water, I begin swimming toward the firelights." I love the way these lines echo, reverberate, and create resonances with what are for no good reason more famous final lines from Norman Maclean's semi autobiographical novel, *A River Runs Through It*, about his brother Paul, another fisherman who dies too young. "Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world's great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs. I am haunted by waters." I think Eliot Treichel is right in there with these literary heavy hitters with his fine final scene where Emma along with her mother and sister are releasing Parker's ashes down the headwaters of the Colorado River. Emma watches the ash and bone settle into the current and gravel: "I've been trying to tell which parts of the sediment were made of him, and which parts had been there before, but they were indistinguishable now. There was no separation. It was all just river." I love this book because Parker reminds me of my own long-lost father, and Emma reminds me of some version of my younger self. I appreciate Treichel's attention to detail, whether it be an urban desert neighborhood or a remote and magical lake Parker and Emma find full of ethereal Showy Egrets. Parker's character becomes as vivid to the reader as Emma's as she remembers the many facets of his interactions with her. The story grabbed, held, and delivered me safely to a new shore, changed forever by the journey.

It's refreshing to read from the POV of a teen girl who's grappling with big emotional stuff such as survival alone in the wilderness, grief, guilt, adapting back into high school through the lens of nature and scientific metaphors. Treichel's rendition of the father's wisdom weaves its way through Emma's consciousness. The dad continues to teach Emma as she reasons through what he'd say in various situations, and how he would cope. Many moving moments that ring true. I find myself thinking of these characters well after the book is over. Great read for people of all ages.

...in the most cathartic way. Treichel captures the experiences of a teenage girl who's struggling to define herself and her identity. Emma is torn between the girlishness of her friends and the outdoors aesthetic of her dad, a lifelong hiker and kayaker; meanwhile, she's drawn to her mom's former hobby of horseback riding, which her dad doesn't understand but bemusedly allows. Amidst this natural teen turmoil, on a remote camping trip that is something of punishment while also illustrating how much Emma has learned from her dad despite her best efforts, he is killed in a hiking accident. Emma's physical and emotional journey hits on the intangible quality of grief, and her struggles to reconcile her conflicted images of and relationship with her father after his passing are heartbreakingly real. Treichel offers no easy answers, but guides the reader through Emma's and her family's struggle to heal while not letting go of the person they love. Having a little experience myself with this type of encompassing grief, Treichel's fictionalized representation rings true while also providing a spark of hope.

I really enjoyed this book. I liked the different way the story was presented and I loved the strong female protagonist. Paddlers will especially enjoy the story as it really delves into the mind of the paddler and how to read water - especially running water. There are some slow spots, and I wanted a bigger reveal at the end, but I recommend this as a YA, adult or older juvenile read.

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