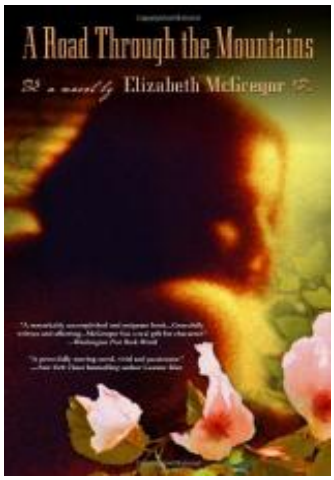
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A Road Through the Mountains

by Elizabeth McGregor



About the Book

From Elizabeth McGregor comes an unforgettably moving, richly layered novel with a timeless love story at its core. Beautiful, suspenseful, hauntingly erotic, **A Road Through the Mountains** tells of one woman's extraordinary journey to a new life with the help of the man she thought she'd lost long ago --- a journey that will take hold of your heart.

Anna Russell is a talented painter and single mother. Her daughter, Rachel, is a ten-year-old whose undoubtedly gifted mind is trapped by a form of autism known as Asperger Syndrome. When a car accident leaves Anna in a coma, both their lives --- and the lives of all those around them --- are changed forever.

Across the Atlantic, David Mortimer receives an unexpected phone call from Anna's mother. The scientist is stunned to learn that he's a father. His long-ago affair with Anna was short and intense; when she suddenly returned home to the States, David slipped into a reclusive life of research, haunted by memories of the girl who'd left him without explanation. Now he knows he must break his self-imposed isolation, go to Boston and the woman he's always loved, meet the child he never knew he had --- and perhaps coax them both out of their silence.

But as David attempts to put together the puzzle of Anna's life as an artist, mother, and daughter, he finds himself involved in a relationship with Anna far more intimate than he expected. Why did she leave him so many years before? Where, as she lies in a coma, is she now? And how is it that he loves this woman even after all these years? When he stumbles across Anna's mysterious fascination with the rare flowers that were once their shared passion, he and Rachel, their beautiful, sensitive child, may just have discovered how to help Anna find a way back --- a road through the mountains.

Lyric, tender, as fragile and enduring as love itself, **A Road Through the Mountains** draws upon its author's personal experiences and establishes Elizabeth McGregor as a major storyteller.

Discussion Guide

1. Both Grace and Anna raised their daughters essentially alone. What are the similarities and distinctions between the ways they experienced motherhood, and love?

2. In what way do Anna's artistic sensibilities complement David Mortimer's scientific ones? What was the basis for their initial attraction?

3. Discuss the ways in which botany makes for a rich backdrop in the novel, and in Anna's paintings. Why was this an appropriate choice on the part of Elizabeth McGregor when she was crafting David's character?

4. The concept of art as commodity drives much of the novel's tension. Does James Garrett also see love as a commodity? What is his motivation in seeking power over Anna?

5. What parallels did you find between the story of Ernest Wilson's experiences in China and David's journey to America? What other forms of destinations and journeying are portrayed in the novel?

6. Discuss the landscape of Anna's comatose world. Is its scenery completely foreign to her? What elements of familiarity and imagination does it contain?

7. What does the absence of Grace at the novel's conclusion indicate about the role of fate versus willpower in the lives of these characters?

8. How does the author's rendering of Oxford compare to that of Cape Cod and Boston? How does each locale suit the events taking place there? What cultural comparisons can be made between the novel's American and English elements?

9. Why was Anna unable to stay in England? Do you attribute her departure to her pregnancy, or the fear that David would become like his father, or were there other unspoken factors in her decision? What drove David to leave his family?

10. Who appears to have had more power in the relationship between Anna and David? How did they change during the decade of their estrangement?

11. What does the novel convey about the physical world versus the one inhabited by the mind and soul? In what way does the portrayal of Rachel as a child living with Asperger's syndrome reinforce these observations? Does Rachel's struggle mirror her mother's in any way?

12. Sara is an integral part of the novel's concluding scenes. What was her role in guiding David?

13. Early in the novel, James Garrett's early years are depicted. Was his upbringing very different from Anna's? In what ways was he transformed by meeting Catherine Graham? Does knowing about his life before Anna affect your opinion of him?

14. What are James' reasons for wanting to gain custody of Rachel? Does he have any capacity for loving her, or Anna?

15. What comparisons can be made between Anna's art and the abstract work that launched James' career (in particular the Mark Rothko painting he acquired from Catherine)?

16. To what or whom do you attribute Anna's recovery?

17. Describe the metaphoric mountains you have faced. How did you find your way through them? Who was your primary guide?

Author Bio

Elizabeth McGregor has held jobs as a patent attorney manager, teacher, and antiques dealer. But it was winning a national short story competition that brought her to her passion for writing. Her previous book **The Ice Child** turned her life around and established an international reputation, selling in 17 countries. **A Road Through the Mountains** was written soon afterward. Elizabeth lives with her daugther Kate on the south coast of England, in Dorset, where she is completing her new novel.

Critical Praise

"I really loved the book. **A Road Through the Mountains** is a powerfully moving novel, vivid and passionate. The characters are so real and the story so poignant...I never wanted the novel to end. I read it straight through and couldn't stop crying. Elizabeth McGregor is a wonderful writer."

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