

Dear Mr. _____,

We are very excited to be working on a new project with you, especially one of *Angle*, *Momentum*, *Lean*'s caliber. Your new novel is an intense read; you very successfully capture the nonsensical, painful, and disruptive effects of the death of a loved one. You have a keen eye for the details of life; you incorporate little scenes another writer might not think of, and therefore you bring more realism to the story; you pile up small grace notes, quirks and habits and idiosyncrasies that define your characters, round them, deepen them, and bring them more to life. For example, right at the beginning, in pages five to seven you give us a great scene with Emma and her dad. We know Emma rides horses, you engage our senses of touch, smell, sight, sound, we see them both smiling, though Emma tries not to. Your writing is built layer upon layer, creating the illusion of reality like a successful trompe l'oeil. It is obvious every sentence is well cared for.

There are just a few things which could use some cleaning up before we move forward with your book. We have separated most of our suggestions into the major categories of **characterization**, **organization**, **theme**, and **setting** for ease of reference.

Characterization

As I've already mentioned, you masterfully create your characters. We feel like Emma, her mom, and her dad are real people we are getting to know. They're complicated, interesting. Each one has their own private motivation. That being said, there are a couple rough patches:

Emma

You very successfully chart the tensions Emma deals with in her family and from her father in particular, and Emma's journey to first survive and find civilization and then to find a new place in the world are aching well done. As much as you successfully capture the pain, I don't exactly root for Emma. Not because she's unlikeable, but because I don't feel like I really know her. What was Emma like before this novel began? I don't feel like you ever show that. What is she like normally? Aside from horses, what interests does she have? Does she like board games? Gossiping? For example, on page 285 you mention her kissing Sean Scardino. This is awesome; it's a tidbit of the normal life of the pre-trauma Emma. It's also just barely mentioned right before the end of the book. Does she have a boyfriend? Has she ever had a boyfriend? Does her dad allow her to date? Another example, you very clearly show Emma doesn't really want to be on the current camping trip, but we're not entirely convinced that she has ever liked the camping trips. She seems to like spending time with her dad and their traditions, like stopping at McDonald's, but the closest we see to her enjoying or at least appreciating the camping trips is on page 125 when Emma feels superior to her friends for her survival skills. Most of your descriptions of past camping trips are either technical, like how Emma's dad can

identify birds or the skills he teaches her, or unpleasant, like Emma crying after running a rapid she didn't want to run. We need to know what Emma is like before the current trip, before she started having conflicting feelings about everything, before she got in trouble for "cheating." If we don't have a reference point for where she starts, then this meaningful and powerful journey she goes on loses impact.

There are also a couple places where Emma acted in a way we thought was out of keeping with her character, such as on page 14. Emma is, at the beginning of the novel, fixated on being a normal girl. We are therefore shocked she doesn't complain more about having to poop in a groover. We understand that she may be more used to it, but if she's daydreaming of Hawaii and sunbathing on a beach then dealing with a groover seems the kind of thing she would lash out about. Or at the top of page 188, Emma observes Dan "didn't correct anything, something that was rare for a guy to do with a woman"; we could understand Emma comparing Dan with her dad, but the way the comment is phrased seems too universal for a girl that, as far as we're aware, doesn't have an extensive dating history, or a history of hanging out with men aside from her father, and who doesn't seem overtly political or activist. Or on page 219 when Emma notices that the Three Stooges don't get knocked out by getting hit on the head. We are really surprised this doesn't trigger her. Considering a single song lyric can trigger a nervous break-down or crying fit, such an obvious link to Emma's trauma seems like it would lead to a strong reaction.

Emma's Friends

Why is Emma friends with Tracy and Heidi? They don't seem to have a single thing in common. I think Tracy and Heidi have the potential to chart how much Emma has changed, but if we don't see a reason for them being there in the first place then they just become irritating. Did Tracy and Heidi change? Did they used to be more genuine and nice? What did Emma do with them before they were in to boys (because that certainly seems their only interest at this point)? Were they never really that great to begin with? That's fine; people are friends with people they only kind of like, but there's still a reason why they're friends in the first place. Even so, at this point, Tracy and Heidi seem so dislikeable we don't understand why Emma even tries to hang out with them. We need to see some brighter spots to Tracy and Heidi. Again, this will help give a reference point for how Emma changes on the journey. Also, Emma currently seems completely detached and alone during the entire novel, even before her dad dies. Surely there is at least one person in the world that she is actually good friends with.

Andrea

Why is Andrea in the novel? What purpose does she serve? You could remove the character completely and it wouldn't really affect Emma's character arc. She's not really present for the first half of the novel; granted, it makes sense that she's not physically present, but she still

needs to be significant to merit her inclusion in the book. Emma's mother, for example, is present in flashbacks and at the police station during the first half of the book. We don't actually want you to remove Andrea as a character; we like her. We would just like for you to clarify the purpose of her character. Were she and Emma best friends at one point, and now Emma is pushing her away? Andrea might then function as a yardstick of how Emma is changing. Has Andrea always been a nuisance, but still provides a source of strength for Emma during her crisis as Magic does? Does focusing on being a better big sister help Emma keep moving through the pain? Like how her dad advises her to focus on the tasks needed to get done in order to keep moving? It almost seems like you incorporate this last plot line into the story when on pages 226-227 Emma observes "And then I realized something else: that how she would come through of all this, how she'd survive and understand it, that also was in large part up to me, a responsibility I wasn't sure I could handle." Emma then rips out the page and says sorry. This could be a great moment of conflict. Or when Emma chooses to sit out when her mom explains the dad's death to Andrea. In order for this to work, though, we would need to see the other side of the coin where Emma chooses to engage with Andrea, where Emma assumes her responsibilities, and finds some sort of peace in doing so. The closest we get to this around page 290 when Emma lets Andrea tuck her into bed and then sleep with her. It's great sisterly interaction, but solitary, and doesn't seem to have a meaningful impact on Emma's grieving process.

Organization

Chapters

We really enjoy how the storyline fluctuates between past and present and even sometimes future; in a way, it echoes the movement of a river, with the twining currents and eddies. Occasionally, however, the delineations of which period we are in are not very clear. Chapter twelve is a good example. The previous chapter we are on the camping trip. The chapter before that we are in the police station. Chapter twelve begins in a diner. Without some reference to the sheriff's suggestion of getting food, the transition is jarring and most readers will have forgotten about the suggestion of the diner. Or for example chapter fifty eight: there is no context for which camping trip this. There are two possible solutions for this. One, you could make sure every scene transition clearly indicates at which point in the story it takes place by giving strong reference points to the reader. Two, you could have every chapter dedicated to one time frame and alternate, using a chapter subtitle to state either when or where the scene is taking place. So, for example, Chapter One: Police Station. If you were to use the second option, you would need to reorganize any chapters where you have two time periods, such as chapter two where you have scenes in both the police station and on the river.

Chronology

There are also moments on the level of the line where chronology gets confusing. Often, this is because of a contraction ending with the apostrophe “d.” Because you write about the present, past, and future, these contractions are confusing as they can either mean someone had done something (they’d=they had) or would do something (I’d=I would, like at the bottom of page 6). Some other moments where chronology gets a little confusing:

At the bottom of page 22, Emma’s dad finds a tarantula and Emma asks to hold it. At the bottom of page 23 Emma says she already held a tarantula upstream; it is unclear whether the description after refers to when Emma held the tarantula upstream or whether it refers to her holding the one her father finds at the bottom of page 22.

Page 85, you flash back to an earlier moment where Emma and her father are discussing what tree they would be, then say “across camp sat our tent” and it’s not until you mention her father’s body is in the tent that we realize you jumped time again.

On page 291 you mention Andrea is back in her bed, but Emma and Andrea had been sleeping together in Andrea’s bed.

These are just further examples and are not meant to indicate a comprehensive list.

Chapter One

Chapter one is so short compared to the rest of the chapters that it stands out. It works more like a teaser than a fully developed chapter; it might work better as a prologue. It would also serve to parallel, structurally, the epilogue.

Chapter Fifty-Eight

As I mentioned before, most of the flashbacks Emma has of previous camping trips are either unpleasant, of her dad being controlling, passive-aggressive, or hypocritical, or merely recounting facts; this chapter, on the other hand, is a beautifully poignant moment of joy between Emma and her father. We think it should be moved much earlier in the novel so the reader can see what a happy camping moment would look like. A couple more moments like this interspersed throughout the novel would be nice, as well.

Missed Opportunities

Very occasionally you jump away so quickly from a scene that I think you miss out on a moment of conflict. The most notable of these is not showing the moment where Emma transitions from trying to save her dad to realizing that he is dead. The descriptions of his seizures are

agonizingly good, and the next morning, when Emma is trying to keep away from the body as much as possible, is uncomfortably well described; but the moment that would probably be the most visceral and emotional in the novel is left unaddressed. What would that moment tell us about Emma? How would she deal with it? What thoughts of her father would go through her head? As hard as dealing with death is, seeing someone you love die in front of you is incomparably worse. Yet, people do have to deal with that level of trauma in real life and your book has the potential to give those who have had to endure such hardship the comfort of not being alone.

Theme

River

We love how the river isn't just a piece of setting in this book but permeates the entire work giving meaning, connotation, and symbolism; everything from how the book is organized, which we mentioned earlier, to little moments like on page 3 and how the IV runs into Emma's arm "like a tiny river" implying recent events on the river have had a permanent effect on her, has become as integral to her self as her blood, to the repeated references to drowning, both literally like Parker's friend does and Emma almost does, and figuratively like how Emma's mom's head feels like it fills up with water after she hears about Parker's death on page 258 echoing her husband's head filling up with blood. You vary your uses and your meanings in a way that is always consistent with the main river theme, that a person can never step in the same river twice. The import builds and pushes, never overwhelming but always rushing under the skin of the reader. We especially like how you tie the river to Parker, not only in his familiarity with it but in how certain traits of his mimics that of a river, like how he was always pushing, always moving, how he had multiple, sometimes conflicting, currents, how he would rush explanations, overpower those around him, and wear others down. The very last two lines are especially beautiful: "I'd 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." Very well done.

One suggestion: we like the concept on page 327 of telling the reader all the destinations Emma's dad will reach once his ashes become a part of the river, but currently it has the mind-numbing effect of Biblical genealogies or lists of warships in the Iliad. Please keep this section, but make it more immersive, conjuring small visuals of each place to pull the reader in and along on this ethereal, spiritual, afterlife journey.

Magic

We really like how Magic is a source of strength for Emma during the novel; in fact, one of our favorite details is on page 10: "Each time I exhaled, my breath echoed in the can. If I breathed

hard enough, it almost sounded like Magic.” This line is not creates a powerful sound and visual for the reader, but implies a lot of Emma and her relationship with Magic. We don’t think this theme is quite as consistently developed as the river theme, however. When Emma decides to learn about equestrian facility management and everyone is surprised, so are we. While it may actually be realistic that some life decisions do catch everyone completely unaware, there are almost always subtle signals to indicate that such a decision is possible. While Emma certainly loves Magic, her horse riding seems more like a hobby than a passion. Emma’s dad is so large a personality he overshadows Emma sometimes; it might be nice if Emma sometimes countered his lecturing about rivers and nature with her own lectures about equestrian care. Could function as both a way for her to stand up to her father and strengthen her ties to Magic and equestrianism.

Compass

We were a little surprised that Emma’s compass didn’t become a symbolic object during the course of the story; it gets mentioned for times in the first 120 pages and you spend a good section of time describing map reading; considering a lot of the story is about finding what direction to go when feeling lost, we were really expecting it to be more important; for example, instead of Emma finding the page of drawings in Andrea’s book she finds the compass and tries to recognize herself in the mirror, or when she’s putting on makeup to mimic the mud designs she gave her father she uses the mirror on the compass to do it. We’re not attached to the idea of the compass being symbolically important, but if you hadn’t thought about it, you might consider it.

White

There are several very noticeable mentions of the color white, but we weren’t sure what this theme might mean. The most notable examples are the sheriff’s office at the beginning of chapter fourteen, with its white walls, white blinds, and bright fluorescent lights; the bandages in the first aid kit on the river; Burt’s very bright white shoes and his white pomeranian—but there are many, many more as well. Were they a reference to whitewater, as in these were troubled parts of Emma’s life to be negotiated by a rapid? If so, this connection might need to be made a little clearer.

Angle, Momentum, Lean

We like the current title of the book; it’s unique and interesting. We are concerned that these techniques don’t seem to be a major theme or relate strongly to Emma’s journey through grief. Currently angle, momentum, and lean gets brought up twice in the book; once on page 128, and once on 313. Otherwise, angle gets used almost exclusively when describing maneuvering on

the water; the only big connection we could draw with angle was it's part in reentry: "You needed to come in at the right speed and the right angle and have the right pitch." Even then, reentry only pops up twice as well. The concept of lean, again, does not seem to relate well to the larger picture of the book, except in the concept of reentry. Momentum certainly has its significance in the book, as the idea of having to keep moving forward is often referenced, but that is only one part of the triad. A better title for the book as it stands now might be *The Same River Twice* as water and change is so much more powerful of a theme. The importance of angle, momentum, and lean in Emma's life outside of the Tinto might need to be clarified to really support those words being the novel's title.

Inspiration

You do an amazing job of describing grief and pain, especially in how the characters react to it, often in indirect but powerful ways. Anyone who has gone through something similar will find a good companion in this book, a friend to hold their hand through the tough times. We did want to mention that you focus a lot more on the journey than on any end result; the message of your book seems to be more about persevering, one foot, one day at a time rather than indicating the grief will get easier to bear. We think that works fine as is; but if you did want to have more of a hopeful feel to the novel, we would suggest putting in some scene or mention Emma in the future feeling more secure, or more happy, or having made some sort of peace with the situation.

Setting

We feel like you create your settings more through the people you describe rather than physical descriptions of locations; the memorial service is a good example. People going to the bathroom in the bushes, what the river rats wear, how the river rats camp, what people say, how Emma's mom focuses on greeting everyone: it all serves to give us a rich emotional context for the event and a visual tapestry of the characters present, which in your work are the most important aspect (a minor note: funeral usually refers to when a body is present at the service. When a body is cremated or absent, it is usually referred to as a memorial service). There were only two spots where not enough description of the setting gave us pause, and one was very minor.

The Tinto

We had no idea until Chapter Two when you mention the cactus on page 7 that Emma and her father were camping in a desert area. We assumed (possibly because we live in the Pacific Northwest) that they were camping in a forested area. It was a pretty jarring realization. We suggest putting in more details of the scenery right away so we know we're in an arid area.

The Spring

The other moment where we had a little trouble visualizing the setting was at the spring, or rather, the spring itself. On page 30 you mention it's a trickle and barely an inch deep and that there is a moss thriving there; if the spring is so small, and the moss so abundant, how is the moss only around the edges? It seemed to us that such a small spring would be almost completely covered with mossy mucous.

Thank you again Mr. ——— for submitting *Angle, Momentum, Lean* to us. We are really excited to move forward with this prospect. We hope you are as equally excited to work with us again and find our suggestions clear, insightful, and inspiring. We look forward to hearing back from you soon.