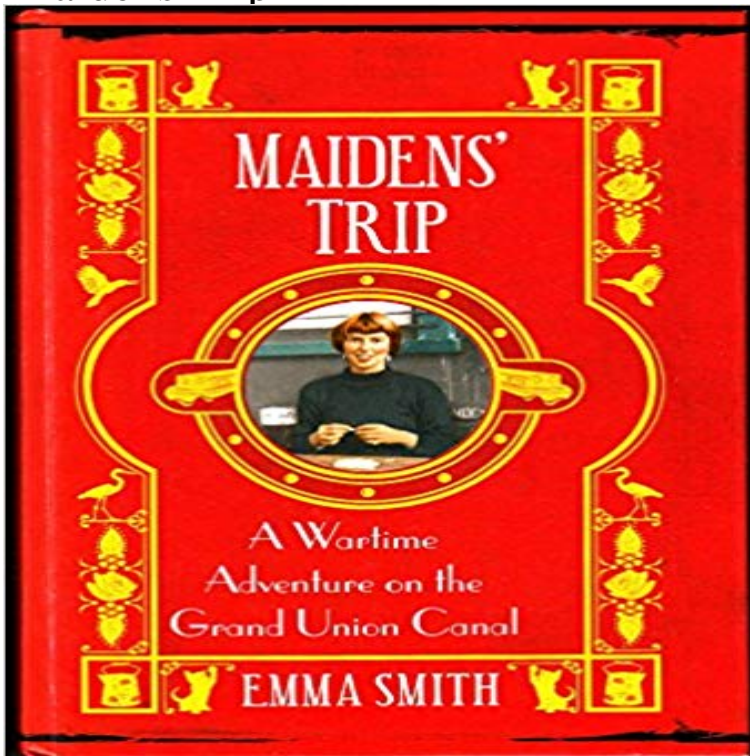


Maidens Trip



In 1943 Emma Smith signed on with the Grand Union Canal Carrying Company under their wartime scheme of employing women to replace the boaters who had joined up. Emma sets out with Nanette and Charity on a big adventure: three eighteen-year-old girls, freed from a conventional middle-class background, precipitated into the world of the boating fraternity. Never before had they met such people, the women with plaited hair and gold earrings, the men with choker scarves and darkly sunburnt faces, whole families existing for generation after generation on boats painted the brilliant colours of blue and scarlet, white and glossy black, living hard but undisturbed lives - until the arrival of these incomprehensible young creatures from another planet. Presented with the motor boat Venus and its butty boat, the Ariadne, the three girls embark on their maiden trip. They learn how to handle a pair of seventy-two foot-long canal boats, how to carry a cargo of steel north from London to Birmingham and, on the return journey south, coal from Coventry; how to navigate hazardous locks in the apparently unceasing rain; how to splice ropes, bail out bilge water, keep the engine ticking over and steer through tunnels. They live off kedgeriee and fried bread and jam, adopt a kitten, lose their bicycles, laugh and quarrel and get progressively dirtier and tougher as the weeks go by. First published in 1948, Maidens Trip is a classic memoir of the growth to maturity of three young women in the exceptional circumstances of Britain at war. Informative and fascinating, it breathes new life into Englands canals and is vivacious, entertaining and poignant. A pure delight.

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