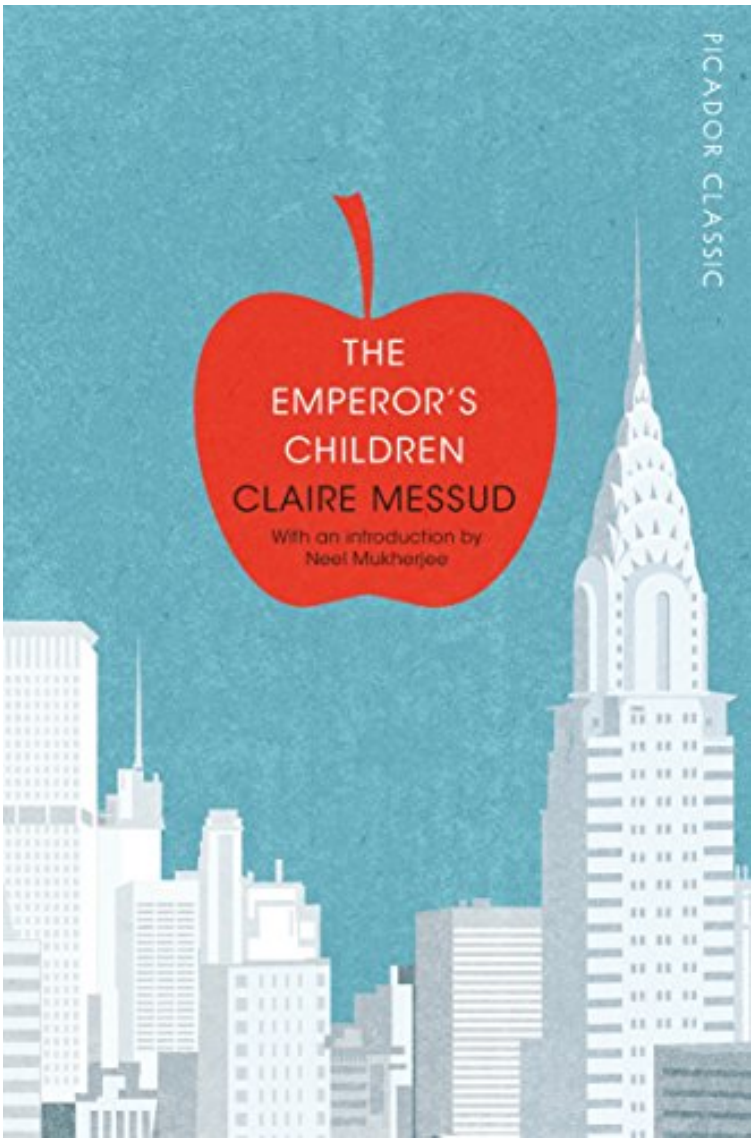
The Emperor's Children: Picador Classic (English Edition)



Par Claire Messud
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(Download) The Emperor's Children: Picador Classic (English Edition)

Par Claire Messud : The Emperor's Children: Picador Classic (English Edition) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Emperor's Children: Picador Classic (English Edition):

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWith an introduction by Neel Mukherjee.In Manhattan, just after the century's turn, three thirty-year-old friends, Danielle, Marina and Julius, are seeking their fortunes. But the arrival of Marina's young cousin Bootie - fresh from the provinces and keen, too, to make his mark - forces them to confront their own desires and expectations.The Emperor's Children by Claire Messud is an American classic: a sweeping portrait of one of the most fascinating cities in the world, and a haunting illustration of how the events of a single day can change everything, for ever.Extrait Our Chef Is Very Famous in London Darlings! Welcome! And you must be Danielle? Sleek and small, her wide eyes rendered enormous by kohl,

Lucy Leverett, in spite of her resemblance to a baby seal, rasped impressively. Her dangling fan earrings clanked at her neck as she leaned in to kiss each of them, Danielle too, and although she held her cigarette, in its mother-of-pearl holder, at arms length, its smoke wafted between them and brought tears to Danielles eyes. Danielle didnt wipe them, for fear of disturbing her makeup. Having spent half an hour putting on her face in front of the grainy mirror of Moira and Johns bathroom, ogling her imperfections and applying vigorous remedial spacklebeneath which her weary, olive-shaped eyes were pouched by bluish bags, the curves of her nostrils oddly red, and her high forehead peelingshe had no intention of revealing to strangers the disintegration beneath her paint. Come in, darlings, come in. Lucy moved behind them and herded the trio toward the party. The Leveretts living room was painted a deep purpleaubergine, in local parlanceand its windows were draped with velvet. From the ceiling hung a brutal wrought iron chandelier, like something salvaged from a medieval castle. Three men loitered by the bay window, talking to one another while staring out at the street, their glasses of red wine luminous in the reflected evening light. A long, plump, pillowed sofa stretched the length of one wall, and upon it four women were disposed like odalisques in a harem. Two occupied opposite ends of the divan, their legs tucked under, their extended arms caressing the cushions, while between them one rested her head upon anothers lap, and smiling, eyes closed, whispered to the ceiling while her friend stroked her abundant hair. The whole effect was, for Danielle, faintly cloudy, as if she had walked into someone elses dream. She kept feeling this, in Sydney, so far from home: she couldnt quite say it wasnt real, but it certainly wasnt her reality. Rog? Rog, more wine! Lucy called to the innards of the house, then turned again to her guests, a proprietorial arm on Danielles bicep. Red or white? Hes probably even got pink, if youre after it. Cant bear it myselfso California. She grinned, and from her crows feet, Danielle knew she was forty, or almost. Two men bearing bottles emerged from the candlelit gloom of the dining room, both slender, both at first glance slightly fey. Danielle took the imposing one in front, in a pressed lavender shirt and with, above hooded eyes, a high, smooth Nabokovian brow, to be her host. She extended a hand. Im Danielle. His fingers were elegant, and his palm, when it pressed hers, was cool. Are you now? he said. The other man, at least a decade older, slightly snaggletoothed and goateed, spoke from behind his shoulder. Im Roger, he said. Good to see you. Dont mind Ludo, hes playing hard to get. Ludovic Seeley, Lucy offered. Danielle Minkoff. Moira and Johns friend. From New York. New York, Ludovic Seeley repeated. Im moving there next month. Red or white? asked Roger, whose open shirt revealed a tanned breast dotted with sparse gray hairs and divided by a narrow gold chain. Red, please. Good choice, said Seeley, almost in a whisper. He wasshe could feel it rather than see it, because his hooded eyes did not so much as flickerlooking her up and down. She hoped that her makeup was properly mixed in, that no clump of powder had gathered dustily upon her chin or cheek. The moment of recognition was, for Danielle, instantaneous. Here, of all places, in this peculiar and irrelevant enclave, she had spotted a familiar. She wondered if he, too, experienced it: the knowledge that this mattered. Ludovic Seeley: she did not know who he was, and yet she felt she knew him, or had been waiting for him. It was not merely his physical presence, the long, feline slope of him, a quality at once loose and controlled, as if he played with the illusion of looseness. Nor was it the timbre of his voice, deep and yet not particularly resonant, its Australian inflection so slight as to be almost British. It was, she decided, something in his face: he knew. Although what he knew she could not have said. There were the eyes, a surprising deep and gold-flecked gray, their lines slightly downturned in an expression both mournful and amused, and the particular small furrow that cut into his right cheek when he smiled even slightly. His ears, pinned close to his head, lent him a tidy aspect; his dark hair, so closely shaven as to allow the blue of his scalp to shine through, emphasized both his irony and his restraint. His skin was pale, almost as pale as Danielles own, and his nose a fine, sharp stretch of cartilage. His face, so distinctive, struck her as that of a nineteenth-century portrait, a Sargent perhaps, an embodiment of sardonic wisdom and society, of aristocratic refinement. And yet in the fall of his shirt, the line of his torso, the graceful but not unmanly movement of his slender fingers (and yes, discreetly, but definitely there, he had hair on the backs of his handsshe held to it, as a point of attraction: men ought not to be hairless), he was distinctly of the present. What he knew, perhaps, was what he wanted. Come on, darling. Lucy took her by the elbow. Lets introduce you to the rest of the gang. This, dinner at the Leveretts, was Danielles last evening in Sydney before heading home. In the morning, she would board the plane and sleep, sleep her way back to yesterday, or by tomorrow, to today, in New York. Shed been away a week, researching a possible television program, with the help of her friend Moira. It wouldnt be filmed for months, if it were filmed at all, a program about the relationship between the Aborigines and their government, the formal apologies and amends of recent years. The idea was to explore the possibility of reparations to African Americansa high-

profile professor was publishing a book about itthrough the Australian prism. It wasnt clear even to Danielle whether this could fly. Could an American audience care less about the Aborigines? Were the situations even comparable? The week had been filled with meetings and bluster, the zealous singing exchanges of her business, the pretense of certainty where in fact there was none at all. Moira firmly believed it could be done, that it should be done; but Danielle was not convinced. Sydney was a long way from home. For a week, in her pleasant waft of alienation, Danielle had indulged the fantasy of another possible lifeMoira, after all, had left New York for Sydney only two years beforeand with it, another future. She rarely considered a life elsewhere; the way, she supposed, with faint incredulity, most people never considered a life in New York. From her bedroom in her friends lacy tin-roofed row house at the end of a shady street in Balmain, Danielle could see the water. Not the great sweep of the harbor, with its arcing bridge, nor the ruffled seagulls wings of the opera house, but a placid stretch of blue beyond the park below, rippled by the wake of occasional ferries and winking in the early evening sunlight. Early autumn in Sydney, it was still bitter at home. Small, brightly colored birds clustered in the jacaranda trees, trilling their joyous disharmonies. In earliest morning, she had glimpsed, against a dawn-dappled shrub in the backyard, an enormous dew-soaked spiderweb, its intricacies sparkling, and poised, at its edge, an enormous furry spider. Nature was in the city, here. It was another world. She had imagined watching her 747 soar away without her, a new life beginning. But not really. She was a New Yorker. There was, for Danielle Minkoff, only New York. Her work was there, her friends were thereeven her remote acquaintances from college at Brown ten years ago were thereand she had made her home in the cacophonous, cozy comfort of the Village. From her studio in its bleached-brick high-rise at Sixth Avenue and Twelfth Street, she surveyed lower Manhattan like a captain at the prow of her ship. Beleaguered and poor though she sometimes felt, or craving an interruption in the sea of asphalt and iron, a silence in the tide of chatter, she couldnt imagine giving it up. Sometimes she joked to her motherraised, as she herself had been, in Columbus, Ohio, and now a resident of Floridathat theyd have to carry her out feet first. There was no place like New York. And Australia, in comparison, was, well, Oz. This last supper in Sydney was a purely social event. Where the Leveretts lived seemed like an area in which one or two ungentrified Aboriginal people might still linger, gray-haired and bleary, outside the pub at the end of the road: people who, pint in hand, hadnt accepted the governments apology and moved on. Or perhaps not, perhaps Danielle was merely imagining the area, its residents, as they had once been: for a second glance at the BMWs and Audis lining the curb suggested that the new Sydney (like the new New York) had already, and eagerly, edged its way in. Moira was friendly with Lucy Leverett, who owned a small but influential gallery down at The Rocks that specialized in Aboriginal art. Her husband, Roger, was a novelist. As John parked the car outside the Leveretts large Victorian row house, Moira had explained, Lucys great. Shes done a lot on the art scene here. And if you want to meet Aboriginal artists, to talk to them for the film, shes your woman. And he? WellJohn had pulled a rueful mouehis novels are no bloody good But we like him, Moira finished firmly. Ill give him this much, hes got great taste in wine. Rogers lovely, Moira insisted. And its true about his books, but hes very powerful here in Sydney. He could really help you, if you needed him. Roger Leverett? Danielle thought a moment. Ive never heard of him. Not surprised. As in our chef is very famous in London. Come again? Theres a nasty-looking little Chinese restaurant in the East Village with a handwritten sign in the windowa dirty window, toothat says our chef is very famous in London. But not in New York, or anywhere else outside of London. And probably not in London either, eh? John had said, as they approached the Leveretts front door. Roger Leverett is very famous in Sydney, sweetheart, whatever you say. At supperprawns and quails eggs with squid-ink noodles, followed by emu, which closely resembled steak and which she had to force herself to eatDanielle sat between Roger and a beautiful Asian boyIto? Iko?who was the boyfriend of an older architect named Gary at the other end of the table. Ludovic Seeley sat next to Moira, his arm languidly and familiarly draped over the back of her chair, and he leaned in to speak to her as though confiding secrets. Danielle glanced over every so often, unable to stop herself, but did not once, until the passion fruit sorbet was before them, find him looking her way. When he did, his spectacular eyes seemed again amused, and they did not waver. It was she who lowered her gaze, shifting in her chair and feigning sudden interest in Ito/Ikos recent trip to Tahiti. The evening now seemed to her an elaborate theater, the sole purpose of which was meeting Ludovic Seeley. That anyone could care for Lucy or Roger or Gary or Ito/Iko in the way Danielle cared for her friends in New York seemed almost implausible: these people, to her, were actors. Only Ludovic was, in his intimate whisperings and unbroken glances, very real. Whatever that meant. Reality, or rather, facing it, was Danielles great credo; although if she were wholly honest, here and now, she believed a little in magic, too. Roger, beside

her, was jovial and solicitous. Mostly, Danielle felt her host was a narcissist, delighted by the sound of his own voice and the humor of his own jokes, and by the pipe he fiddled with and sucked upon between courses. He was generous with the red wine, more so to her and himself than to those farther afield, and he grew more positively loquacious with each glass. Been to McLaren Vale? Not this time? When do you leave? Ah, well then. Next time, promise me youll get to South Australia, do the wine route. And theres great scuba diving off the coast. Been scuba diving? No, well, I can see you might be intimidated. I used to do a lot of diving in my day, but you can get yourself in some very nasty situations, very nasty indeed. About twenty years agoI wasnt much older than you are nowhow old are you? Thirty? Well, you dont look it, my girl. Such fine skin. It must be those fine Jewish genesyou are Jewish, arent you? Yes, well, anyway, the Reef. I was up diving with some mates, this is before Lucy, shed never let me do it now. I was living up near Brisbane, finishing my second novelRevelation Road, you probably dont know it? No, well, Im not vain about these things. It was a great success at the time. And anyway, this trip out to the Reef was the reward, you know, for a job well done, the editor was jumping up and down in Sydney he was so mad about the manuscript, but I said, screw it, George, Im entitled to celebrate before I come back, because once youre in this world youre in it, arent you? So where was I? The Reef, yes. It was my first time out there, by helicopter, of coursefirst time in a copter, if you can believe itand we were four blokes . . . Rogers blithe torrent grew murkier to Danielle with each sip of claret, and she pasted her smilequite genuine; she was enjoying herself, and lord knew it wasnt effortfulin permanence upon her face. She smiled while slurping the inky noodles, while dissecting the antennaed prawns. She felt as though she smiled even while chewing the rather tough emu fillet, plucking the dense slices from their bed of bloodied polenta. She smiled while glancing at Ludovic Seeley, who did not glance back, and smiled at Moira, at Lucy, at John in turn. When Roger went to fetch the dessertI do the wine, my dear, and the clearing up. The fetching and carrying. And I make the meanest risotto youll ever taste, but not tonight, not tonightDanielle turned to Ito/Iko and learned that he was twenty-two, an apprentice in a fashion house, that hed known Gary eight months, and that theyd recently had the most fabulous holiday in Tahiti, very Gauguin, and so sexy. I mean, the people on that island are so sexy, its to die. Is that where Captain Cook got killed, in the end? Danielle asked, feeling very culturally au fait to be dropping the founders name. Oh no, doll, that was Hawaii. Very different vibe altogether. Totally different. Ito/Iko flashed a broad smile and fluffed at his hair, which was, she decided, slightly tinted with blue, and glistening in the candlelight. You havent been here very long, have you? Because everyone knows it was Hawaii. I mean, I know it was Hawaii, and I dropped out of school at sixteen. After the meal, the party resettled in the living room, where Ito/Iko curled under Garys arm like a chick beneath a hens wing. Danielle gratefully abandoned her wineglass at the table, and sat sipping water as movement and general conversation buzzed around her in a pleasant fog. She felt a thrill of alarmof lifewhen Ludovic Seeley took the armchair to her right. What takes you to New York? she asked. He leaned in, as shed seen him do with Moira: intimacy, or the impression of it, was clearly his mode. But he did not touch her. His shirt cuff glowed against the plum velvet of the chair arm. Revolution, he said. Im sorry? Im going to foment revolution. She blinked, sipped, attempted silently to invite elucidation. She didnt want to seem to him unsubtle, unironic, American. Seriously? Seriously, Im going to edit a magazine. What magazine is that? The Monitor. She shook her head. Of course you havent heard of itI havent got there yet. It doesnt exist yet. Thats a challenge. Ive got Merton behind me. I like a challenge. Danielle took this in. Augustus Merton, the Australian mogul. Busy buying up Europe, Asia, North America. Everything in English and all to the right. The enemy. Lucy, bearing coffee, appeared suddenly, tinily, before them. Hes done it before, Danielle. Hes a man to be afraid of, our Ludo. Hes got all the politicians and the journos on the run in this town. The True Voicehave you seen it? Oh. Moira told me about it. I mean, she told me about you. We dont see eye to eye on pretty much anything, Lucy said with a conciliatory smile at Seeley, touching her delicate hand with its black nail polish to his lavender shoulder. But my God, this bloke makes me laugh. He bowed his head slightly. A true compliment. And the first step on the road to revolution. And now youre going to take on New York? Danielles skepticism evidently made him bristle. Yes, he said clearly, his gray eyes, their hoods fully retracted, now firmly and unamusedly upon her. Yes, I am. Danielle rode home in the backseat with her eyes shut for most of the way. She opened them periodically to glimpse flashes of the city, the sulfurous lights on the asphalt and the marine sky. Roger certainly loves to talk, she said. Did he tell you about his novels? Bore you senseless with unwieldy plots? Moira asked. No, scuba diving. And the wine route. Better than that Asian guy. Garys new boyfriend? He seemed sweet. Sweet? John scoffed. Sweet? He was sweet. No, he really was. But not very interesting. There was a silence, during which Danielle longed to ask about

Seeley but did not want to seem to care. Of the evenings underwater blur, Seeley was all that stuck out. Did you talk to Ludo at the end? asked Moira. Ludo, is it now? John said. My dear, arent we grand? Is he really a big deal? Danielle hoped her voice was neutral. He seemed a little creepy, or something. Hes moving to New York, you know, said Moira. Hes been hired in to launch a magthey sacked the first guy, you may have read about it. Merton thought his vision was wrongBillings, was it? Billington? Buxton, I think. Big scandal. Makes Seeley the chosen boy, plucked from halfway across the world. Hes going sometime very soon. Next month, Danielle said. I gave him my e-mail. Not that hell need it, but in case hes at a loose end. Trying to be neighborly. Thats a good one, John said. Seeley at a loose end. That Id like to see. Think hell succeed? Danielle asked. He thinks so, said Moira. In fact, he knows so. But he doesnt give much away, so its hard to know what hes really plotting. And its hard to know whether hes running to something or running away. Hes made such a splash here in the past, what is it, five yearsChrist, hes only what? Thirty-three? Thirty-five? A baby!and hes got a lot of friends And a lot of enemies, said John. And I just dont think theres any challenge for him here anymore, thats all. But a ton of hassle. With this kind of backingjeez, Mertons choice!he probably reckons hell conquer New York, and then the world. Like Kim Jong Il, eh? Or Saddam Hussein? said John. Well, it might not be as easy as he expects, said Danielle, thinking herself surprisingly witty in spite of the quantities of red wine. It may just be a case of our chef is very famous in London. That it may, John said, obviously satisfied at the thought. That it may. chapter two Bootie, the Professor Bootie? Judy Tubb yelled, in her housecoat at the bottom of the stairs, washed in the dull, pearly light of the reflected snow outside. Bootie, are you going to come down and help dig us out, or what? Met by silence, she set a foot upon the creaking step, her hand on the polished wooden ball at the banisters base, and started, as loudly as she could, to climb. I said, Bootie? Did you hear me? A door opened and her son ambled into view on the gloomy landing, pushing his glasses up his nose and squinting. His old-fashioned brown flannel pyjamas were rumpled around his soft bulk, and his first pre- occupation seemed to be that his mother not catch sight of his pale and generous belly: he clutched at his pyjama strings and hoisted up the bottoms, revealing instead his oddly slender ankles and his long, hairy toes. Have you been sleeping all this time, since breakfast? Judy spoke sharply but felt a burst of tenderness for her befuddled boy, as he wavered before her, almost six feet tall. Bootie? Frederick? Are you still asleep? Reading, Ma. I was reading in bed. But theres two feet of snow in the drive, and its still coming down. I know. Weve got to get out, dont we. Schools cancelled. You dont have to go anywhere. Just because I dont have to teach doesnt mean I dont need to go anywhere. And what about you? Frederick pushed a fist behind his glasses and rubbed his left eye. Youre supposed to be looking for a job, arent you? Youre not going to find one lying around in bed. Theres a snowstorm on. Everything is cancelled, not just school. Theres nowhere to go today, and no jobs to get today. He seemed suddenly solid, even stolid, in his bulk. Besides, my reading isnt nothing. Its work, too. Just because its not paid doesnt mean its not work. Please, dont start. Ask Uncle Murray. Dont you think he spends his days reading? I dont know what your uncle does with his time, Bootie, but Id remind you that hes well paid for it. Very well paid. And I know that when he was your age, he was in college and he had a job. Maybe two jobs, even. Because Pawpaw and Nana couldnt afford I know, Ma. I know. Im going to finish my chapter. And then if its stopped snowing, Ill shovel the drive. Even if its still snowing, Bootie. Theyve plowed the road twice since seven. Dont call me Bootie, he said as he retreated back into his bedroom. Its not my name. Judy Tubb and her son lived in a spacious but crumbling Victorian house on the eastern side of Watertown, off the road to Lowville, in a neighborhood of other similarly sprawling, similarly decrepit buildings. Some had been broken up into apartments, and one, at the end of the street, had been abandoned, its elegant windows boarded over and its porch all but caved in; but that was simply the way of Watertown. It was still a good address, a fine house on a fine square lot at the good end of town, as respectable as it had been twenty years before when Bert and Judy had moved in with their little daughter, Sarah, and Bootie not even on the way. Born a mile from this house, Judy had lived her whole life in town, except for college and a few years teaching in Syracuse. Watertown was to her as invisible as her skin, and she no longer saw (if she ever had) the derelict storefronts and sagging porches. The grand downtown, once known as Garland City, its stone buildings and central plaza constructed on an imperial scale, impressed her only rarely as forlorn: mostly it seemed, as she drove through it to the high school or to the Price Chopper, of a blind and consoling familiarity. So, too, with their neighborhood, their house: she cleaved to them lovingly, simply because they were hers. The house itself had steep steps at its front, and a small cement patio with a little balcony overhanging, which opened off the upstairs hallway. The Tubbs had had aluminum siding put on in the early eightieswhite, simplebut it had grown grubby and mottled with moss and mud, and was in places dented by

fallen gutter pipes or bowed by the work of zealous squirrels or birds who had made their nests between the siding and the exterior wall. The remaining wood trim was painted green, but it had been worn bald in spots and was everywhere cracked and peeling. The snow covered the worst of the buildings indignities (including a rotting patch of brick in the foundation), and softened its outlines, so that the peaked roofonce of slate, now of poorly stapled asphalt sheetingseemed to rise with a solid confidence into the clouded sky. Inside, the Tubbs home was still elegantexcept, perhaps, Booties room, a territory to which Judy laid no claim. Little had been done to the rooms in yearsshe had not had the courage for even a coat of paint since Berts death from pancreatic cancer four years beforeand they had about them, perhaps in consequence, a heavy, darkened aspect; but she kept the house clean, its wood polished, its linoleum waxed, even its windows (at least in summer, when the storms were taken down) washed. There was little to be done about the stubborn dottings of mold on the basement wall (she blamed the aluminum siding, after all these years, which kept the house from breathing) or in a patch on the blue bathroom lino behind the toilet. But by and large, Judy considered that all was in fine repair, the old cabinets and wide-planked floors, even the small red-and-blue-lozenged stained-glass window over the front door, which she knewBert had discovered it; he loved researching such thingshad been ordered from a Sears catalogue all the way back at the turn of the last century. She loved her house, largely though not only for the history that it held, and she was most partial to the upstairsthe grand, bright bedroom overlooking the street that she had shared with her dear husband, and where, were it not for the hospital, he would have died; the broad hall with its balcony and gleaming banisters; even the faded pink flowered carpet along the floor, with its faint smell of dust, which she knew so intimately that she could locate, in her mind, its gnawed edges, its threadbare patches and its irremovable stains. As she moved from that hallway into her beloved bedroom, worrying about her sullen son (it was the age, she kept telling herself, his and the cultures), she felt she walked into the light: the two large windows cast a shadowless opalescence onto the sprigged wallpaper, the family photos on top of the bureau. Even her discarded stockings, still carrying from yesterday the shape of her solid limbs, appeared outlined in light, luminous. Her hands and her hair, a grayed cloud, had carried up from the kitchen the smell of coffee, and the vents at her ankles pushed a warm wind around the floor. In spite of Bootie, in spite, in spite, in this moment at least, she felt happy: she was not too old to love even the snow. Judy Tubb made her bedtidily, smoothing the bottom sheet and removing the stray gray curls from her pillow, then squaring and tucking the top sheet, the mustard wool blanket. She fussed over the bedspread, its evenness on both sides, the plumpness of the pillows beneath its folds. She had no truck with duvets, flimsy and foreign: she liked the weight of a bed made with blankets, and the work of it. She showered, dried, and dressed in the bathroom in the hallthe house was Victorian, and had only the one bathroom in spite of four bedroomsand emerged in her favorite blush turtleneck beneath the avocado angora cardigan she had knitted last winter. In truth, she had knitted it for her niece, MarinaGod only knew why, because they werent close; except that she loved to knit and had already made a dozen sweaters for her daughter and her grandkids. But it wasnt quite finished in time for Christmas, and somehow she had known, when she opened the gift Marina had senta crimson velvet scarf with cutaway flowers in it and silk tasseled fringe, like the shawl of a Victorian madamshe had just known that the sweater wasnt right. Shed sent a Borders gift card instead, and kept the sweater for herself. As for the scarf, there was nowhere in Watertown, New York, that she could wear itcertainly not to teach Geography to the sophomores and juniors at the high schoolso she had wrapped it up in tissue and put it in the back of her dresser drawer. The funny thing was, she loved the cardigan as if it had been a precious gift, and she somehow thought of it as a gift from Marina, which made her think more warmly of the girl after all, and which, in a roundabout way, it was. As she bundled herself into her parka, her Bean boots, her pink woolly toque (also her own handiwork, a pretty lace pattern with a bobble on top), and took, in her mittened hands, the aluminum shovel from the porch, she worried about Bootie, upstairs in his pajamas like a boy. She wouldnt ask him again to help with the shovelinghe could perfectly well hear the rhythmic scrape and shuffle of her movements from his window overheadbut she hoped against hope that he might come down of his own accord. Of course if he did come, it would mean another day he hadnt bathed. She didnt like to nag him about it (who wanted to be that kind of mother, always picking and finding fault?), but she couldnt remember hearing the tub run once in the past week. He took only baths, not showers, and those rarely; but when he did he lingered an hour in the cooling water, reading one of his infernal books. Judy Tubb tackled the snow in the driveway first and, in spite of the delicious cold of the shovel through her mittens, in spite of the cold sting pinkening her cheeks, in spite of the satisfying soreness she felt, almost immediately, in her lower back, she felt her good humor evaporating as she thought again about her boy. Her darling and only.

Her prize. What was it now? March, it was March now, and almost Easter. And Bootie had graduated almost a year ago, at the top of his class. Shed never imagined he would still be here, or would be back here; and when, in September, hed gone off to Oswego, shed thought that it was the beginning of his life in the wider world. No telling what he could accomplish. And if Bert were still alive, hed see that his youngest had fulfilled the promise, that all the saving (Bert had been an accountant, and wisely parsimonious) had been for something. For Bootie to shine. It was Sarah whod given them trouble, pregnant at nineteen and married at twenty, but now she had a good job at the savings and loan and three tow-headed, boisterous kids, and her Tom had proven a good husband and settled into his work running Thousand Islands boat tours out of Alexandria Bay in the summer and plowing on a state contract in the winter. Heck, Tom would probably drive down from the bay and shovel out her drive before her own boy stirred himself to help her. He was a good son-in-law, even if shed hoped, once, for better. But Bootie: he was going to be a politician, hed said, or a journalist like his uncle, or maybe a university professor. Thats what the kids had called him at the high school: the professor. Hed been a chubby boy, and bespectacled, but always respected, even admired, in a funny way. Hed been valedictorian. And then home at Christmas with twenty or thirty extra pounds on him and a fistful of incompletes, saying that college was bullshit, or at least Oswego was bullshit, that his teachers were morons and he wouldnt go back. She suspected a girl, some girl had broken his heart or embarrassed himhe wasnt easy with girls, not confidentor else his roommates, two tight lunk-headed athletes with beer on the brain; but Bootie wasnt telling, or not telling her. And since Christmas hed spent all his time in his room, reading and doing God knew what on the computer (was it pornography? That would be okay, she could understand it in a young boy, but as a distraction, not an obsession; and if only she knew), or in the grand pillared library downtown, where the heat was always too high and the air smelled funny and where, to be honest, he had to order books from out of town to get anything more serious than Harlequin romances or the Encyclopedia Britannica. Had he looked for a job? Not once until last month, when she gave him an ultimatum, told him hed have to pay rent one way or another, if he wouldnt go back to school; so that now he made a big show at breakfast with the classifieds, circling factory jobs and short-order cook positions and suggestingit was the only time he laughed these daysthat he could sell used cars at Loudouns Ford Truck, or wait tables at Annies off the interstate. And now here he was on the porch, no gloves, no hat, ski jacket over his pajamas, wielding the second rusty and old shovel, like a weapon, with the steam of his breath fogging his glasses.From the Hardcover edition.From Publishers WeeklyMarina Thwaite, Danielle Minkoff and Julian Clarke were buddies at Brown, certain that they would soon do something important in the world. But as all near 30, Danielle is struggling as a TV documentary maker, and Julius is barely surviving financially as a freelance critic. Marina, the startlingly beautiful daughter of celebrated social activist, journalist and hob-nobber Murray Thwaite, is living with her parents on the Upper West Side, unable to finish her book"titled The Emperor's Children Have No Clothes (on how changing fashions in children's clothes mirror changes in society). Two arrivals upset the group stasis: Ludovic, a fiercely ambitious Aussie who woos Marina to gain entre into society (meanwhile planning to destroy Murray's reputation), and Murray's nephew, Frederick "Bootie" Tubb, an immature, idealistic college dropout and autodidact who is determined to live the life of a New York intellectual. The group orbits around the post"September 11 city with disconcerting entitlement"and around Murray, who is, in a sense, the emperor. Messud, in her fourth novel, remains wickedly observant of pretensions"intellectual, sexual, class and gender. Her writing is so fluid, and her plot so cleverly constructed, that events seem inevitable, yet the narrative is ultimately surprising and masterful as a contemporary comedy of manners. 100,00 announced first printing; author tour.(Sept. 4)