

The Emperor's Children Study Guide

The Emperor's Children by Claire Messud

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Plot Summary

Claire Messud's novel, *The Emperor's Children*, traces the lives of three college friends who are approaching the age of thirty in 2001 Manhattan, New York. Their experiences in the months approaching 9/11 depict the struggles of finding and losing love, establishing an identity in a changing world, and the consequences of chasing an ill-chosen dream.

Danielle Minkoff, Marina Thwaite, and Julius Clarke have kept in close touch in the years following college, and are now approaching thirty. Danielle is established in her career, but feels there is something missing in her life. Marina has been working on a book for seven years with no completion in sight. Julius is working temporary jobs, putting on a front to the world, and yearning for the chance to be part of a great gay couple with someone who is wealthy and powerful.

Danielle meets Ludo Seeley during a business trip to Sydney, Australia and is immediately attracted to him. When Ludo moves to New York, however, he meets Danielle's friend Marina and they become lovers. When Marina's father, Murray Thwaite, begins to flirt with Danielle, she becomes involved in a love affair with this man who is married and thirty years her senior.

Ludo is in New York to launch a thought-provoking, rebellious magazine called *The Monitor*, and he begins his rebellion against society by sniping at Murray; however, he makes all of his derogatory remarks to Marina and Danielle, never to the man himself. Ludo seems to be accomplishing his goals to destroy Murray and those icons like him when he marries Murray's daughter and begins turning her against her father, and then obtains Bootie's expose of Murray and prepares to publish it. However, the events on 9/11 end the magazine and Ludo disappears from the novel to seek employment in England.

Marina finishes her book entitled *The Emperor's Children Have No Clothes*. Instead of a frivolous view of children's fashion, it has become a critical summary of society's failure to allow children to be childlike, dressing them instead to reflect absurd societal values. Ludo's influence on Marina has effected this change, and Murray instantly declares the book unworthy of publication.

Julius finds his long-awaited relationship with David Cohen, but immediately begins to be unfaithful with strangers, seeking the thrill of almost getting caught. When Julius actually does get caught by David, the results are disastrous and violent, and Julius comes away physically and emotionally scarred for life.

Bootie is an innocent and self-absorbed young man who enters the world of Manhattan society completely unprepared and unsuspecting of what awaits him when he seeks out Murray to offer himself as a disciple at the great man's feet. Judy sees her son leave the safety of the Watertown family home, never to return. Bootie is welcomed into the Thwaite home, but not into the family. He is given employment, which allows him access



into Murray's private sanctuary. Bootie believes he was meant to find Murray's secret manuscript, reads it, and prepares a biting but badly written expose of the work. Bootie gives copies of his article to his mother, his cousin Marina (who he has fallen hopelessly in love with) and to Murray. Bootie is completely surprised to be summarily thrown out of Murray's office, and makes his way to a rundown apartment in Brooklyn, where he is living when the terrorist attacks of 9/11 occur.

Danielle begins to realize that she is just a diversion to Murray and that he may never leave Annabel for her. This becomes a reality on the morning of September 11th, when Murray leaves her after a night of passion and the horror of the attacks, and goes back to Annabel for his own comfort.

Bootie uses the confusion of the attacks to depart Manhattan for Florida, where he changes his name and his view of life.

Danielle is depressed by what has happened to her chosen home town and by Murray's abandonment, and she contemplates suicide. Just before completing this attempt, she reaches out to her brassy but positive mother, Randy, who rescues her and takes her to Florida to recuperate.

There in Florida, Danielle encounters Bootie, who is now so completely transformed into Ulrich New, he speaks of Bootie as a deceased friend of Danielle's, and offers sympathy. The morning after encountering Danielle, Bootie leaves Florida, positively looking forward to a future where he will continue to take the world by surprise.



MARCH - Chapter 1, Our Chef is Very Famous in London, Chapter 2, Bootie, The Professor, Chapter 3, Reflexology, and Chapter 4, As for Julius Clarke

MARCH - Chapter 1, Our Chef is Very Famous in London, Chapter 2, Bootie, The Professor, Chapter 3, Reflexology, and Chapter 4, As for Julius Clarke Summary

Claire Messud's novel, *The Emperor's Children*, traces the lives of three college friends who are approaching the age of thirty in 2001 Manhattan, New York. Their experiences in the months approaching 9/11 depict the struggles of finding and losing love, establishing an identity in a changing world, and the consequences of chasing an ill-chosen dream.

Danielle Minkoff is in Sydney, Australia, researching a television documentary, and she is attending a party. She meets Ludo and is instantly attracted to this mysterious and rebellious man. He tells her he is moving to Manhattan.

In Watertown, New York, Frederick "Bootie" Tubb is trying to decide what to do with his life. Since he left college in Oswego, he has embarked on a self-study program, but has stalled. He lives with his mother, Judy Tubb (Murray Thwaite's sister), who dotes on him. Judy is outside shoveling snow from the sidewalk. Judy is blissfully happy with her home and her life, and she knows Bootie is destined for great things in life.

Julius Clarke and Marina Thwaite are in Stockbridge, New York, at her family's vacation home. It is cold and wintry, and Marina is there ostensibly to work on her manuscript. She became bored in the first week, and called Julius, one of her best friends, to come entertain her. Julius is more than happy to sit around the fire, rubbing Marina's feet and talking about the people they know back in Manhattan.



MARCH - Chapter 1, Our Chef is Very Famous in London, Chapter 2, Bootie, The Professor, Chapter 3, Reflexology, and Chapter 4, As for Julius Clarke Analysis

In these chapters, most of the main characters are introduced. Danielle is presented as a successful television executive with the ability to travel the world. She is stable and serious.

Marina is drifting in life. Her boyfriend of five years has left her for another woman, she cannot complete her manuscript after seven years, and she has just moved back with her parents. The wintry and somewhat scary surroundings of the Stockbridge home are symbolic of Marina's fear of life itself. Julius is flamboyant, erratic, and desperately trying to be part of the rich and powerful of Manhattan, as displayed by his willingness to scurry to Marina's side. Ludo is portrayed as some sort of sleek animal, easily adaptable in any environment, charming to the point of hypnotic.

Bootie, on the other hand, is in the womb of his family home, emotionally detached from the world, cared for by his mother.



Chapter 5, Poetry Makes Nothing Happen, Chapter 6, The Pope is Sick, Chapter 7, Introducing Murray Thwaite, by Roanne Levine (newspaper staff)

Chapter 5, Poetry Makes Nothing Happen, Chapter 6, The Pope is Sick, Chapter 7, Introducing Murray Thwaite, by Roanne Levine (newspaper staff) Summary

Murray is lecturing at a seminar at an unnamed university, and afterwards, he joins a colleague at the local tavern for a drink. They are approached by a journalism student who wishes an interview with Murray. The student, Roanne Levine, subsequently writes a glowing review about his lecture and about the man himself. Murray goes home to find his daughter has returned from Stockbridge, and that the family's aging pet cat has vomited all along the hallway. He does nothing to clean up the vomit; believing his wife or the maid can take care of that.

Danielle returns from Sydney, and Marina has asked her to come for dinner at the Thwaite home. Danielle arrives and is greeted by Murray because Marina had a last minute hair appointment. Murray and Danielle have a nice conversation, and they both realize privately that they are attracted to one another. When Murray's wife Annabel and Marina come home, they order Chinese takeout, and enjoy a nice dinner. The discussion at dinner surrounds Annabel's work as a lawyer with troubled teenagers, especially one she is concerned about, named DeV Vaughn.

After dinner, Marina and Danielle retire to Marina's bedroom and Danielle suggests to Marina it is time to get a job and move out of her parent's house. Marina resists talking about anything serious, so Danielle finally gives up and they talk about Julius.

Chapter 5, Poetry Makes Nothing Happen, Chapter 6, The Pope is Sick, Chapter 7, Introducing Murray Thwaite, by Roanne Levine (newspaper staff) Analysis

The author uses the newspaper article to give the reader a more fleshed out history of Murray Thwaite.

The wealth and prestige of the Thwaite family is revealed in this chapter through long descriptions of the large apartment-style home and its elegant furnishings. Annabel is



introduced in this chapter, and is immediately presented as a strong woman who is active in the betterment of society through her work as a lawyer. Murray and Danielle, thirty years apart in age, find much in common with each other, and a mild flirtation has begun. Marina's inability to focus on her life is evident in her conversation with Danielle when she becomes defensive at Danielle's suggestions that she move on with her life.



Chapter 8, An American Scholar, Chapter 9, Rumpelstiltskin, Chapter 10, Talking to a Grown Child

Chapter 8, An American Scholar, Chapter 9, Rumpelstiltskin, Chapter 10, Talking to a Grown Child Summary

Bootie is in the bathtub, reading, and contemplates his life with his mother Judy. He admires his Uncle Murray, and is in awe of him. Bootie believes himself to be capable of great works, but since eschewing the standard routine of attending university classes, he is not sure what to do next. After much contemplation, he decides to leave Watertown for Manhattan, by way of a friend's house in Massachusetts. Bootie believes that glamour and glory awaits him as Murray's shadow in Manhattan.

Julius is on his way to his most recent temporary staffing job. He allows Marina and Danielle to think he spends his time cruising for sex on the internet, or sitting around with friends—anything rather than the mundane fact that he makes his living as a clerk. He is well regarded as an employee, and gets good assignments. On this job, he meets David Cohen, an apparently wealthy and successful gay man. Julius is determined to end the week's assignment by leaving on David's arm.

Murray is in his study, contemplating his secret manuscript. After writing for years on politics and issues, he has been working on a book he titles "How to Live", which gives guidance to people about how to conduct their lives with dignity. He hides the manuscript in a safe, and sees this as his legacy to the world. Marina asks for permission to come in and he only half listens to her as she asks him about her own manuscript. Marina feels she wants to do something significant, and Murray tells her to get a job. When she leaves his office, he thinks only about his own manuscript, and about adding a chapter in it for guidance on speaking to one's children.

These chapters show three of the characters making plans, foreshadowing change in the future. Bootie has decided to leave Watertown, Julius has picked a mate, and Murray is progressing on his secret manuscript.



Chapter 8, An American Scholar, Chapter 9, Rumpelstiltskin, Chapter 10, Talking to a Grown Child Analysis

Chapter eight gives the reader more insight into Bootie's struggle for the right path. It is symbolic of his feelings being laid bare and open when the reader finds Bootie naked in the bath. Bootie's experience at Oswego reflects his inability to deal successfully with life and his surprise at finding college life to be not what he had expected, or rather, his inability to have expectations.

Julius feels his work is beneath him, as in his mind's eye he is one of Manhattan's gay playboys. He quickly sees David as his ticket to power and wealth, and begins scheming to begin a relationship with him before the end of this temporary assignment.

Murray is far more concerned with his secret manuscript, his courtship of Danielle, and the possible impact Marina's writing could have on his own status than to be a true father intent on assisting his daughter in solving her problems. After only partially listening to her painful admissions, he gives her perfunctory shallow answers, and is glad when she finally leaves. It is ironic that he begins to consider adding a chapter on how to discuss problems with one's grown children, when he has just been so inadequate in doing so with his own daughter.



MAY - Chapter 11, A Mother Knows Best, Chapter 12, Danielle's List

MAY - Chapter 11, A Mother Knows Best, Chapter 12, Danielle's List Summary

Danielle's mother, Randy Minkoff, is in Manhattan for the week. Randy mother is staying at the Days Inn because there is no room for the two of them in Danielle's studio apartment. Danielle and Randy go to the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art and have lunch at the more expensive restaurant there. Marina joins them for lunch, and then Ludo comes to their table for a quick round of introductions.

Marina leaves an excited message on Danielle's phone regarding Ludo, and Danielle is a little annoyed. Danielle is in the sanctuary of her studio apartment, which is small but tastefully furnished. As she tries to prepare for sleep, she makes a list of what is on her mind: 1) she has promised her mother she would call when she got back to her apartment, so she makes the call; 2) she does not want to call Marina back and talk about Ludo; 3) she contemplates her new-found friendship with Marina's father, Murray. They are emailing and casually flirting, and she is not sure where this is going; 4) Danielle does not want to spend Thursday afternoon with her mother, although that has been planned; and, 5) Julius is in the middle of an affair with David, and neither Marina nor Danielle have been introduced to his new lover.

MAY - Chapter 11, A Mother Knows Best, Chapter 12, Danielle's List Analysis

Randy is a refreshing burst of reality and positive outlook in Danielle's life, but she feels only embarrassment at her mother's style, sense of language, choices, and attitude. This is further reinforced by Marina's comments about Randy over the years.

The author focuses on Danielle's controlled and stable life as she organizes her thoughts. This list represents what is important to her life, and at this point, bothersome obligations to her mother dominate her thoughts, but underlying is the issue she saves for last: her flirtations and email correspondence with Marina's father, Murray.



Chapter 13, Great Geniuses, Chapter 14, All For Love, Chapter 15, Do You, Napoleon?, Chapter 16, The Fat Man Cometh

Chapter 13, Great Geniuses, Chapter 14, All For Love, Chapter 15, Do You, Napoleon?, Chapter 16, The Fat Man Cometh Summary

Bootie is now in Amherst, Massachusetts, and has been there for three weeks. He fits in comfortably with these college student roommates, but things are about to change because the students are going back to class. Bootie sees himself as a student of the world, and is resentful when his friend Donald approaches him about getting a job and paying rent if he wants to stay. Bootie feels it is significant that he left Watertown, and knows he will eventually end up in Manhattan, but has no real plan or timetable. He decides to leave for Manhattan the next day and present himself to Murray as a disciple.

Julius and David have been a couple for two months, and their relationship is comfortable. Julius never stays at his Pitt Street apartment, choosing instead the relative luxury of David's place. David is everything Julius has ever wanted in a partner, and he sees all his dreams coming true when David asks him to move in.

Danielle is having lunch with Ludo, an event arranged by her, supposedly to talk to him about doing a documentary on his new magazine, The Monitor. Ludo sees himself as Napoleon and the magazine as his vehicle to revolutionize society and thinking. Danielle suggests that Ludo give Marina a job at the new publication. Danielle is surprised to hear Ludo speak of Murray Thwaite in degrading terms, as an icon that does not deserve respect or attention. Ludo calls Murray the Wizard of Oz.

Marina helps her father out in his study by sorting papers, filing, and checking sources for him. Annabel comes into the room and announces that Bootie has called and will be coming to stay at the Thwaite home for a while. Marina is dismissive of Bootie, remembering him only as the fat kid that lived in Watertown. Murray is kinder, but too busy with his own concerns to think much about Bootie's arrival.



Chapter 13, Great Geniuses, Chapter 14, All For Love, Chapter 15, Do You, Napoleon?, Chapter 16, The Fat Man Cometh Analysis

These chapters represent major changes for Bootie, Danielle, Julius, and the Thwaite family through seemingly innocent events. Bootie has made a partial move, accommodating part of his goal, and would have settled down for a much longer stay in Massachusetts had his friend not gently kicked him out. Bootie sees himself as extremely put upon and unappreciated by this behavior, and decides to bless someone more worthy with his presence. Julius has found his meal ticket at last. Danielle has her long awaited personal encounter Ludo and finds out Ludo despises Murray. Marina's world is about to change with the arrival of her cousin Bootie.



Chapter 17, No Place Like Home, Chapter 18, The Pope's End

Chapter 17, No Place Like Home, Chapter 18, The Pope's End Summary

Murray thinks about his daughter, briefly about his nephew Bootie who is coming, then about Danielle. He sends an email to Danielle proposing that they meet over lunch or drinks to discuss his concerns about Marina, hoping that this might move the relationship along. Murray calls Judy and finds out Bootie has not shared his plans with his mother. Murray thinks of how he escaped Watertown long ago, and the banality it represents. His philosophy is "never an office, never a timetable, never an alarm clock, always a new city, a new person, a new drink, another discovery, always more life, more".

Marina, troubled with her lack of success on the book, wanders about the house, and finds herself in the room now designated for Bootie, who will be arriving any day now. She discovers the dead body of Pope, the family cat, and cries out. Her father comes in to comfort her, and they decide not to move the cat, or even to alert someone about its death. They decide to just let Annabel find the cat and deal with it.

Chapter 17, No Place Like Home, Chapter 18, The Pope's End Analysis

Murray is reminded of the banality of Watertown, and is congratulating himself on his escape from that world. He looks down from his lofty perch to his sister Judy, and pities her, as a lord might pity the poor. Murray prides himself that he turned away from the protestant work ethic, the life of his father and mother, and became what he is now: an icon, a thinker, someone who matters. His personal philosophy of more, new, different, is what he feels entitled to demand of his life.

This author emphasizes Marina's complete inability to deal with the commitment writing the book requires. Marina and her father believe they are meant to do great things, produce great work; however, a simple household task of attending to the death of a family pet is beneath them both.



Chapter 19, Bootie Takes New York, Chapter 20, Julius's Dilemma

Chapter 19, Bootie Takes New York, Chapter 20, Julius's Dilemma Summary

Bootie is in Manhattan, sitting in a park near the house, thinking about his new life. He is awed by the Thwaite home, Murray, and especially Marina. On his first night in Manhattan he was asked to join the family at a party, and went ill prepared in his manner, his dress and his expectations. Annabel befriends him but he realizes it was out of pity. As he is sitting, he is surprised by Marina, who invites him to accompany her to SoHo. He takes his first ride on the subway, and feels abnormally claustrophobic. Bootie meets Danielle, and envies her apparently smooth transition to become a New Yorker. Marina and Danielle talk about their friends, about Julius, and how Julius has moved in with David and now has his apartment to sublet. Danielle tells Bootie to visit the World Trade Center, and then jokingly says real New Yorkers don't do that.

Julius is at David's apartment, and David is out of town. Julius has arranged for a complete stranger, Dale, to come to the apartment for sex. Dale arrives, and Julius realizes the thrill is not the sex or the stranger but the possibility of getting caught.

Chapter 19, Bootie Takes New York, Chapter 20, Julius's Dilemma Analysis

Here the author is showing how truly unprepared Bootie is to be a New Yorker. Even Danielle, who is originally from Columbus, talks down to him. The description of his being overweight, underdressed, sloppy, and dazed is symbolic of his vulnerable emotional condition as he attempts to fit into Manhattan.

The real Julius is exposed to the reader; a man who is in a committed relationship, yet seeks the thrill of sex with strangers. As Julius engages in sex with Dale, there is a heightened sense of tension because David could walk in at any moment and catch them. This tension creates suspense and foreshadowing of danger for the reader.



Chapter 21, Awards Night, Chapter 22, Enough About Us

Chapter 21, Awards Night, Chapter 22, Enough About Us Summary

Danielle, Marina, and Murray are attending an awards dinner in Murray's honor. Ludo is there as well, and trades seats with another person so he can sit with Danielle. All through the dinner he snipes and whispers to her about Murray, but at the end he wants to meet the famous man. Ludo's mocking bothers Danielle, who is scheduled to meet Murray for drinks in a few days. She is undecided about her feelings for Murray.

Marina and Julius meet and discuss Bootie. Marina says Bootie makes her feel creepy. She asks Julius about David and why she and Danielle haven't met him. Marina tells Julius about Ludo and that he has offered a job at the new magazine. Marina teases Julius about having temporary jobs, and they talk about Bootie, but to Marina's dismay, there is no talk between her and Julius about their own friendship and how it seems to be waning these past few months.

Chapter 21, Awards Night, Chapter 22, Enough About Us Analysis

It becomes apparent to the reader that Ludo considers Murray the representation of all that is wrong with American society. Tension is heightened as Danielle is seeing her friend's father as an icon receiving an award, a potential lover, and a subject of derision by Ludo.

This conversation represents an insight into the relationship of two of the three friends, engaging in a shallow discussion of friends and places. It also shows how Marina is very much like her father in thinking the world revolves around her.



Chapter 23, A Helping Hand, Chapter 24, A Helping Hand (2), Chapter 25, A Helping Hand (3), Chapter 26, A Helping Hand (4)

Chapter 23, A Helping Hand, Chapter 24, A Helping Hand (2), Chapter 25, A Helping Hand (3), Chapter 26, A Helping Hand (4) Summary

Murray meets an old friend, Boris, for a drink, then goes to meet Danielle. Murray recognizes that his unfaithful liaisons are as much a part of his life as his wife, his daughter, or even his recently deceased cat. The evening with Danielle is promising and exciting.

Judy is in Watertown, missing her son more than she realized. She is beginning to resent Murray and to somehow blame him for Bootie's absence.

Marina tells Danielle that Ludo has offered her a job. Marina is excited by her conversations with Ludo, remarking that he wants to take the world by surprise. Danielle suggests to Marina that she should ask Bootie and Julius to contribute articles to the new magazine.

Bootie has been in New York for two weeks and has fallen in love with Marina. Murray has hired him to become his secretary, and Bootie realizes he needs to find his own place now. Bootie discusses Julius's apartment with Marina, and she agrees to ask about it, but quickly forgets. Bootie begins work in his secretarial duties. Sitting in Murray's office while Murray is out of town, he finds the secret manuscript.

Chapter 23, A Helping Hand, Chapter 24, A Helping Hand (2), Chapter 25, A Helping Hand (3), Chapter 26, A Helping Hand (4) Analysis

These chapters represent beginnings for some of the major characters, with Danielle and Murray take their flirtations to the next level by meeting for a drink, Marina beginning to work for Ludo, and Bootie starting his job as Murray's secretary. The theme of "taking them by surprise" is foreshadowed here with Bootie's discovery of Murray's secret manuscript, and doom is foreshadowed by Judy's beginning resentment of Murray for being someone Bootie wanted to be with rather than her.

The author again emphasizes Murray's use of an above average vocabulary when Murray asks Bootie to become his amanuensis, rather than his secretary.



Chapter 27, Floating, Chapter 28, I See You, Chapter 29, For Shame, Chapter 30, Merge

Chapter 27, Floating, Chapter 28, I See You, Chapter 29, For Shame, Chapter 30, Merge Summary

Marina accepts the job as Culture Editor at Ludo's new magazine, and soon thereafter they have their first kiss. Marina giddily calls Danielle and is disappointed when her friend does not share her happiness.

Aurora the maid is thinking about her view of Murray and how it is completely different than that of Marina or Annabel. Aurora was at work one afternoon when Annabel's client DeVaughn was brought over by the social worker and needed a place to stay. Aurora watches as Murray politely but firmly turns DeVaughn away.

Marina has a new approach to her book about children's clothes, an approach that has been shaped by her conversations and relationship with Ludo. His version of the world as a place of masquerade and charade and lies has seeped into her book, and he has even named it "The Emperor's Children Have No Clothes". Marina sees her relationship with Ludo as pure, free, clear and frank. He tells her she cannot truly be free until she steps away from her father.

Danielle and Murray are at her studio apartment, and after sex, they discuss her Rothko paintings and how they reflect upon Manhattan. Danielle thinks about how she now has a secret she can never share with anyone. She is confident in the knowledge that she knows Murray through and through, and this relationship has filled in what was missing in her life.

Chapter 27, Floating, Chapter 28, I See You, Chapter 29, For Shame, Chapter 30, Merge Analysis

In these chapters, Marina begins to be bombarded with Ludo's encouragements to move away from her father and stop being in Murray's shadow. Marina begins work anew on her book, and it is heavily slanted towards Ludo's views of the world. Murray is presented to the reader in an unsavory light in the chapter written through Aurora's point of view, and this foreshadows changes in Murray's status with his daughter, as engineered by Ludo.

The author establishes the intensity of Danielle's affair with Murray, and increases the tension because Danielle is keeping a secret from her closest friends. She has been

spurned by Ludo for Marina, and therefore has accepted Murray's overtures. Her tidy apartment is now filled with smoke and the smell of her new lover.



JULY - Chapter 31, Booted

JULY - Chapter 31, Booted Summary

Bootie has finally moved into the Pitt Street apartment that Julius has sublet him, although he has yet to meet Julius. It is very hot in the tiny apartment, but Bootie has shed most of his clothes and is working on the article he plans to write about Murray's manuscript. After reading this manuscript, Bootie is no longer an admirer of Murray. Bootie is determined to fulfill Marina's request for an article with an expose of her father. Bootie also knows about the affair Murray is having with Danielle. Suddenly, Julius and another stranger he has found to have sex with burst into the apartment. Julius is high and makes ugly remarks to Bootie about being so fat. Julius and his stranger leave.

JULY - Chapter 31, Booted Analysis

In this chapter, the author offers contrasts between the Murray with whom Danielle has fallen in love, the Murray who sees himself as a respected icon, and the Murray that Bootie has come to dislike so intensely. Bootie is laid bare at the tiny Pitt Street apartment, symbolically almost nude, with his feelings raw and vulnerable. The theme of being taken by surprise is predominant in this chapter wherein Bootie is planning a surprise expose for Murray and is suddenly and completely surprised by Julius.



Chapter 32, Expose, Chapter 33, Affianced, Chapter 34, Fireworks in Stockbridge

Chapter 32, Expose, Chapter 33, Affianced, Chapter 34, Fireworks in Stockbridge Summary

Julius is leaving the stranger's apartment the next morning, feeling guilty because he was supposed to take the train to Scarsdale to spend the holiday with David and his family. He remembers the last time he was in Scarsdale and how tolerant and overly kind David's family was to him. Marina has asked Julius to write an expose about the gay culture in Manhattan, and he thinks he could do that.

Marina and Ludo are at Stockbridge with Murray and Annabel. In the morning out by the garden, Marina tells Annabel that she and Ludo are getting married on Labor Day weekend. Annabel's advice to Marina is not to idealize her future husband. Murray comes out to join them, but Marina leaves the garden before her father reaches them, deciding not to tell her father about the wedding just yet.

Danielle is in her office alone. She usually spends her holidays with the Thwaite family in Stockbridge, but this year she declined, citing a heavy work schedule. She cannot imagine occupying her usual guest room at the vacation home with her lover just a few doors away. Marina thinks it is because of Ludo being there. When the phone rings in her office, Danielle immediately thinks it is Murray and answers the phone "Beloved"—but it is Marina who tells her about the wedding and insists on Danielle coming to Stockbridge if only for the day. As Danielle leaves the office, she runs into Bootie, who hints about an article he is writing for Marina. Danielle thinks Bootie looks a little crazy.

Chapter 32, Expose, Chapter 33, Affianced, Chapter 34, Fireworks in Stockbridge Analysis

These three chapters address the avoidance techniques practiced by Marina, Danielle, and Julius. Danielle's encounter with Bootie shows the reader how Bootie looks to others, disheveled and a little insane. This view is very different from how Bootie sees himself.



Chapter 35, Notes from Underground, Chapter 36, On the Grill, Chapter 37, After Supper

Chapter 35, Notes from Underground, Chapter 36, On the Grill, Chapter 37, After Supper Summary

Bootie is at the Pitt Street apartment and feels hostility from the very walls. He knows the Thwaites are in Stockbridge and decides to go to their house to work. He runs into Danielle, and thinks about her affair with Murray. He believes the whole city of Manhattan is rotting. He reads the notes of his manuscript and knows he needs to work on it more. On the way to the Thwaite house, his subway is stuck for twenty-three minutes. His claustrophobia is overwhelming but he controls it and feels he has undergone a life change when he emerges from the subway.

At the Stockbridge family home, Murray is grilling dinner and Ludo is talking to him. Marina arrives and announces that Danielle is coming the next day. Ludo leaves the room, and Marina asks Murray if he is happy for her. Murray realizes the reason for Danielle's calls on his cell phone now, and that he has more thoughts about Danielle than he should have. At dinner, Annabel announces that she must return to the city because of problems with DeVaughn. Marina pouts, and Ludo becomes zealous about Annabel and DeVaughn and how it reflects upon society itself. Annabel does not agree and becomes agitated, which makes Murray angry, but Marina intercedes and changes the subject.

Marina and Ludo are in bed, talking about Ludo's conversation with Annabel. He encourages her again to move away from her father, both emotionally and physically.

Chapter 35, Notes from Underground, Chapter 36, On the Grill, Chapter 37, After Supper Analysis

The author is creating a sense of impending doom and change for Bootie, using the uncomfortable apartment, the strange meeting with Danielle, and a truly horrific experience in the subway. Ironically, Bootie chooses the home of his least favorite person in order to seek refuge from the city heat.

The Thwaite family is joined at the vacation residence by Ludo, the new fiance, who manages to disturb both Murray and Annabel with his remarks. When Marina attempts to reprimand him, Ludo simply turns her weak mind into seeing his view.



Chapter 38, Murray Thwaite: A Disappointed Portrait

Chapter 38, Murray Thwaite: A Disappointed Portrait Summary

Bootie is at the Thwaite home, eating their food, sleeping all day, leaving a mess, and writing his expose about Murray. He roams throughout the refrigerator, eating everything he finds and leaving a mess. He writes all night and awakens when he realizes Annabel has come home early. He feels pity for himself, that no one wants him. Annabel is very pleasant to him, but asks him to tidy up before he leaves. She even asks him to come to Stockbridge with her. Bootie is dismayed to learn that Marina and Ludo are getting married.

Chapter 38, Murray Thwaite: A Disappointed Portrait Analysis

The author brings out two salient points here by showing how oblivious Bootie is to the possible consequences of his publication of the Murray expose, and how truly nice Annabel is to everyone.



Chapter 39, The Fourth of July (1), Chapter 40, The Fourth of July (2), Chapter 41, The Fourth of July (3)

Chapter 39, The Fourth of July (1), Chapter 40, The Fourth of July (2), Chapter 41, The Fourth of July (3) Summary

Julius wakes up from a phone call from David, who is very angry that Julius is not yet in Scarsdale. After he finally does go to Scarsdale, he wishes he was with Marina and Danielle, because they understand him.

Danielle feels uncomfortable riding with Annabel to Stockbridge, but Annabel is consumed with her problems with DeV Vaughn. Danielle discusses Ludo's philosophies with Annabel, and admits she does not care for him. Annabel tells Danielle about the conversation with Ludo concerning DeV Vaughn. As they arrive in Stockbridge, the rain and wind pick up. Danielle and Marina are discussing the coming wedding when Murray enters the room. Danielle soon realizes that Murray is behaving as he always had, before their affair. She does not know what she expected, but this is upsetting her. The storm rages outside. Over dinner, Danielle sees how much Murray dislikes Ludo. Finally, after dinner during a quiet moment while no one is around, Murray touches Danielle on the top of her head, from behind, and nothing is said between them.

Marina tells Ludo that Danielle must be in love with him because she has admitted to a forbidden love. Ludo turns her comments around, like he does everything, saying it is his desire that people see things more clearly. Again, he mentions to Marina that she must move out of her father's shadow.

Chapter 39, The Fourth of July (1), Chapter 40, The Fourth of July (2), Chapter 41, The Fourth of July (3) Analysis

The storm outside the Stockbridge house is not heard or felt by the inhabitants because of the house's solid construction. This is symbolic of the strength of the bond between Annabel and Murray. Julius is uncomfortable around the Cohen family, representing his internal struggle of wanting a relationship, but unable to do the necessary things to keep it going.



Ludo's urgings for Marina to remove herself from her father increase to a constant level. The author shows all the main characters in the flux of their situations, but none are yet ready to make any changes.



Chapter 42, Let Go, Chapter 43, Finished, Chapter 44, Weird

Chapter 42, Let Go, Chapter 43, Finished, Chapter 44, Weird Summary

Julius is waiting for David to come home, but David is six hours overdue. While waiting, Julius throws a little fit, messing up the apartment. When David does arrive, he tells Julius he has been fired.

Marina finishes her manuscript and gives a copy to Murray and one to Ludo. Murray resists reading it, but Danielle and Frederick separately encourage him to do so as soon as possible. Murray is upset about the book and the fiancé, and Danielle comments that Ludo seems obsessed with Murray.

Murray sets the time aside from his busy schedule and reads Marina's manuscript. He finds it to be unworthy of publishing. He asks her to lunch to discuss the book. At lunch he tells her the book is not worthy of publication. Marina's reaction is to tell Murray his analysis is exactly what Ludo has predicted.

Marina tells Ludo that Murray thinks the book to be awful. Ludo says again that she needs to step away from her father. Marina cries, calls Danielle, and Danielle takes Murray's side about the book. Marina is upset but does not hang up. She tells Danielle she's trying to move away from Murray, as directed by Ludo.

Chapter 42, Let Go, Chapter 43, Finished, Chapter 44, Weird Analysis

Events begin to occur for each of the characters in unexpected ways. Danielle is the only exception, serving as confidant for Murray and Marina. Julius's world is turned upside down when his perfect boyfriend is suddenly unemployed and homeless. After seven years of prevaricating, Marina has finished her book, only to have her father dismiss it as silly.



Chapter 45, Murray Thwaite: A Portrait, by Frederick Tubb, Chapter 46, The Cuckoo in the Nest

Chapter 45, Murray Thwaite: A Portrait, by Frederick Tubb, Chapter 46, The Cuckoo in the Nest Summary

Bootie is becoming consumed with reading Murray's manuscript, then working on his own expose of Murray. He thinks about how much he loves Marina, and how he believes if Marina reads his expose, she will fall in love with him. Bootie prepares three copies of the expose: red for Marina, navy for Judy, and black for Murray. When Judy receives hers, she calls Bootie and asks him if he is going crazy.

For the first time, Bootie is realizing that Murray's reaction might not be "entirely fine" as he has reassured his mother. Marina calls Bootie and totally surprises him by being upset by the content of the expose. She does, however, tell him that Ludo is thinking of publishing it.

Bootie waits for Murray to call, but he does not. Bootie goes to the Thwaite house, expecting to work his usual day for Murray, but Murray calls him into his office and is angry. Murray is angry that his private manuscript has been read, and he is upset about Bootie's insolence. When he is fired, Bootie realizes that he never expected that to be the outcome of his actions.

Marina and Danielle are discussing Bootie's essay, which Marina has read, but Danielle has not. Marina is wondering how true and insightful Bootie's expose actually is, and realizes it concurs with Ludo's views of Murray. Marina accuses Danielle of being in love with Ludo. Marina is questioning her father's integrity, repeating everything that Ludo says about Murray, and Danielle is beginning to get concerned. Danielle remembers the conversations she had with Murray about Bootie.

Danielle relates to Bootie because they are both non-New Yorkers who are desperately trying to be New Yorkers. Murray says he will take Danielle on a helicopter ride over the city sometime. Murray says he will never publish the book now. Marina and Danielle are discussing Julius and David, and the fact they will need to move back to Julius's Pitt Street apartment now that David is unemployed.

Chapter 45, Murray Thwaite: A Portrait, by Frederick Tubb, Chapter 46, The Cuckoo in the Nest Analysis

Bootie is obviously very proud of his completed expose, as he selects a different colored binder for each of the recipients. His expectations are simply that Marina will



read the piece and instantly fall in love with him. In his confrontation with Murray, he is almost physically expelled from the Thwaite home. His surprise is overwhelming that Murray did not leave his secret manuscript in a locked safe expressly for Bootie to find it.

Marina is becoming more and more swayed by Ludo's advice about her father, and now Bootie's expose is affecting her as well. This chapter represents a turning point for Marina, who begins to believe her father has other motives than her best interests at heart.



SEPTEMBER - Chapter 47, The Man Without Qualities, Chapter 48, Getting Ready, Chapter 49, Home Again, Chapter 50, Lady In Waiting

SEPTEMBER - Chapter 47, The Man Without Qualities, Chapter 48, Getting Ready, Chapter 49, Home Again, Chapter 50, Lady In Waiting Summary

Bootie must now move out of the Pitt Street apartment, and he finds a small room in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. He gets a job as a busboy. He tells Judy a very romantic version of his life, but she is angry at Murray. Bootie has registered with Julius's temporary agency and feels like he is making progress. As he is moving out of the Pitt Street apartment, Julius and David are moving in. That night, as Bootie is falling asleep in a tumble of sheets and blankets on the floor of the new apartment, he comforts himself with thoughts and memories of Marina.

Marina is preparing for the wedding, and Annabel is in charge of everything. Ludo's family is not coming, and Marina realizes she is angry at Murray, disappointed in Ludo, unhappy with her best friends Julius and Danielle, and she is afraid Bootie is going to somehow disrupt the wedding. Her publisher is thrilled with the book and it will be published in a year. Marina has not told Murray.

Marina tries to talk to Ludo about her concerns, but he is so involved in the magazine launch that he dismisses her.

David hates Julius's apartment, and tells him at every moment. David does not want to go to the wedding, but Julius convinces him it is one way to get out of the apartment.

Danielle is at Stockbridge, and experiencing the stress of her secret affair with Murray. Marina is a mess, and Annabel is very busy. Danielle observes how Marina and Murray depend on Annabel so much, and Danielle begins to see that she may just be a diversion to Murray. When they are alone for a few minutes, Danielle asks Murray for one night together.



SEPTEMBER - Chapter 47, The Man Without Qualities, Chapter 48, Getting Ready, Chapter 49, Home Again, Chapter 50, Lady In Waiting Analysis

The remoteness of Bootie's new abode accentuates how far he has now been thrust from the Thwaite family and from Manhattan. His surroundings are spare and mean, but he is happy.

Marina appears left to her own devices to sort out her feelings about marriage and her future. She has success on the horizon with the publication of her book, but she has not told the most important person in her life, her father. She feels caught in a whirlwind and her friends seem distracted and unavailable. Marina is shown as a thinking woman in this chapter, one who is on the verge of tremendous changes in her life.

The three friends are at a state of unrest in these chapters. Marina feels alone and ignored. Julius has a very unhappy partner, and Danielle is beginning to feel as if she is only a diversion to Murray. Their feelings are raw and on the edge, and each character has foreshadowing of bad changes in their lives.



Chapter 51, Vows by Lisa Soloman, Chapter 52, Bedtime, Chapter 53, Tiger Woods

Chapter 51, Vows by Lisa Soloman, Chapter 52, Bedtime, Chapter 53, Tiger Woods Summary

The first chapter is the New York Times report of the wedding of Marina Thwaite and Ludovic Seeley. It reports on the bride's dress, the Stockbridge home and wedding area, and about Murray being the father of the bride.

Annabel and Murray are in bed after the wedding. They discuss Ludo, then Bootie's expose, and then they make love.

Danielle wakes up on the floor of Julius and David's hotel room. Danielle reviews her memories of the wedding, and how she could not stay in Stockbridge with only Annabel and Murray there. She thinks of the brief conversations she had with David, then about dancing with Julius and watching Marina and Ludo interact shortly after the wedding. David wakes up and volunteers to take Danielle to the train station right away. Their conversation on the way to the train station is not easy, and Danielle gets the distinct feeling she is being dismissed. As she waits for the train, all she can think of is Murray.

Chapter 51, Vows by Lisa Soloman, Chapter 52, Bedtime, Chapter 53, Tiger Woods Analysis

Marina and Ludo marry among the Manhattan elite. Murray and Annabel are in their comfortable routines, and Danielle escapes the discomfort of that reality by leaving with David and Julius. David's meanness is apparent in his treatment of Danielle, but she does not see it because she is wrapped up in her feelings and thoughts about Murray.



Chapter 54, An Evening on the Town

Chapter 54, An Evening on the Town Summary

David and Julius are talking about their relationship and discuss getting married. Julius realizes he finally has what he has always wanted, but suddenly he doesn't want it. The next day, back in the apartment, they argue, but make up by deciding to go out for dinner, then to a bar. At the bar, they do coke and drink too much, and when a handsome stranger invites Julius into the men's room, he goes gladly. David pulls them both out of the stall and begins a savage beating of Julius, even biting him on the cheek. Julius makes it home and soon David arrives with the police. David is allowed to get his things and leave. Julius heads to the emergency room.

Chapter 54, An Evening on the Town Analysis

The novel takes a violent and abrupt turn in this chapter, as Julius's misdeeds and unfaithfulness finally come to a head. The previously petty, but mild-mannered and somewhat boring David becomes a vicious, biting fighter. The author uses theme of taking someone by surprise in an exceptionally nasty description of the fight.



Chapter 55, Married, Chapter 56, Not Telling, Chapter 57, A Speaking Engagement

Chapter 55, Married, Chapter 56, Not Telling, Chapter 57, A Speaking Engagement Summary

Marina feels neglected by Ludo and calls Danielle. Danielle tells her Julius has been hurt and is coming over, so Marina decides to come as well. The three friends sit at Danielle's studio apartment and talk about David feeling entitled to hurt Julius, and about Bootie feeling entitled to say what he wanted about Murray.

After Marina leaves Danielle's apartment, Julius says he knows Danielle is seeing someone because she seems different and the apartment even smells different. After Julius leaves, Danielle begins reviewing her plans for her tryst with Murray on Monday night. She is buying food, and putting the fancy sheets on her bed.

Murray is preparing for the trip that he knows is cancelled but his family thinks is still on. On the way to the airport, he is fine, but in the taxi to Danielle's house, he almost backs out. When he arrives, Murray tells Danielle he has arranged for them to go on the helicopter ride that evening. They spend the afternoon together, a sumptuous lunch, and hours in bed. After the ride, during supper, Danielle mentions Annabel, and Murray says he will call her that evening. The shadow of his marriage settles over them both.

Chapter 55, Married, Chapter 56, Not Telling, Chapter 57, A Speaking Engagement Analysis

The three friends reunite at Danielle's tiny apartment to tell secrets, but Danielle keeps her best one to herself: Murray is coming to spend the night on Monday. Murray feels some pangs of regret, but decides to go anyway. Murray and Danielle's helicopter ride represents their escape from reality, soaring high above the city. Manhattan is seen from above, beautiful and lit up, and the characters are unable to see the seamy, ugly side of the town.



Chapter 58, The Morning After, Chapter 59, The Monitor, Chapter 60, At Home, Chapter 61, Fort Greene, Chapter 62, Clairon Call

Chapter 58, The Morning After, Chapter 59, The Monitor, Chapter 60, At Home, Chapter 61, Fort Greene, Chapter 62, Clairon Call Summary

Danielle awakens and takes a shower. It is Tuesday, September 11, 2001. Murray is standing at the window, gaping at the scene of the World Trade Towers on fire. Murray tries to call Annabel but cannot get through. He decides to go home to Annabel, and leaves Danielle to deal with her emotions on her own. She is numb.

Ludo cancels the launch party, and says all the correct things to his shocked staff, but when he is in the private office with Marina, he tells her the magazine is finished before it begins. Marina is still in shock about the terrorist attacks, and they go home to their apartment. Later they walk from their apartment to Union Square and see all the pictures of missing people. Ludo reacts angrily about the country and people who don't want to face facts. Marina realizes Ludo is more upset about the magazine than about what has happened to Manhattan.

Judy, in Watertown, is determined that life will go on, but is concerned about not hearing from Bootie. She keeps her hair appointment the day of the terrorist attacks, then calls Julius's apartment to ask about Bootie. Julius cannot help except to tell her Bootie moved to Fort Greene. Judy calls her daughter, and then continues to wait for Bootie to call. He does not. On Thursday, she calls Murray, but he has not heard from Bootie either. Murray says he will send someone to look for Bootie in Fort Greene.

Marina and Julius go to Fort Greene to find Bootie, but he is not in his apartment, nor is he at his temporary job on Cedar Street. Marina and Julius are shocked at the conditions Bootie was living under, and Marina feels bad for him.

Bootie is in Florida, in a motel room. He escaped the destruction of the towers because he was running late and was in the subway. He walked out of Manhattan, took a bus to Florida, and decided along the way to change his life. He changed his name to Ulrich New, and got a job at a restaurant. He has not called his mother or his uncle or even Marina to let them know he is still alive.



Chapter 58, The Morning After, Chapter 59, The Monitor, Chapter 60, At Home, Chapter 61, Fort Greene, Chapter 62, Clairon Call Analysis

Manhattan is taken by surprise by the terrorist attacks, and Danielle is taken by surprise over the realization she'll never have Murray. Ludo's true character is underlined as he thinks only of the fate of his magazine during this horrific situation for Manhattan and America.

Bootie is missing and suddenly the person who was cast aside is being sought by Marina, Julius, and Murray. Judy's feelings of resentment against Murray are intensified. However, Bootie is not a victim of the attacks at all, and has safely used the confusion of 9/11 to escape to Florida.



NOVEMBER - Chapter 63, Burying the Dead (1), Chapter 64, Burying the Dead (2), Chapter 65, Burying the Dead (3), Chapter 66, Burying the Dead (4), Chapter 67, Take Them By Surprise

NOVEMBER - Chapter 63, Burying the Dead (1), Chapter 64, Burying the Dead (2), Chapter 65, Burying the Dead (3), Chapter 66, Burying the Dead (4), Chapter 67, Take Them By Surprise Summary

Judy sets the date for a memorial service for Bootie. In her mind, Murray is to blame for her losing her son.

The Thwaite family and Julius are in Watertown to attend the memorial service for Bootie. Julius is recovering from his wounds, but will always have a scar. He allows people to think his injury happened as a result of the disaster. Ludo and Marina are not getting along, and Ludo has gone to England to look for work. Marina asks Danielle to come to Watertown, but Danielle says she is going away. Danielle spends all of her time sleeping, and Marina and Julius are trying to pull her out of a depression.

Bootie's memorial service is November 17th, and Murray takes an early morning walk in his old hometown. He thinks of the morning of September 11th, when he left Danielle and went home to Annabel, who welcomed him without question. He tried to call Danielle after a few days, but she finally leaves a message saying "please leave me alone". Murray has been approached by CNN and other national and international entities for his comments on the disaster, and he has now decided to continue with the publication of his secret manuscript.

Danielle is at her lowest, but just before taking the remainder of the medications she has stored up to kill herself, she calls her mother Randy for help. Randy comes to get her, takes her to Florida for the sunshine and recuperation. Here, Danielle begins to recover.

One evening, Randy and Danielle go to dinner at a restaurant, and Danielle recognizes Bootie. She approaches him, but he is reluctant to talk to her. She is shocked about him allowing his family to think he is dead, but Bootie is adamant about his new name and his new outlook on life. When they part, Danielle is surprised to hear Bootie talk about himself as if he were someone else by saying " I am sorry about your friend".



The next morning, Bootie, now Ulrich New, decides to leave Miami after seeing Danielle the night before. He feels confident he will find success in his new life, and knows he will take the world by surprise.

NOVEMBER - Chapter 63, Burying the Dead (1), Chapter 64, Burying the Dead (2), Chapter 65, Burying the Dead (3), Chapter 66, Burying the Dead (4), Chapter 67, Take Them By Surprise Analysis

Murray is forced to relive his past while attending the memorial service for Bootie in Watertown, but instead of reflecting on the loss of his nephew, he reinforces his own high opinion of himself. The author ironically shows how the man who has alienated his daughter, his nephew, cheated on his wife, and abandoned his mistress, still feels entitled to write a book teaching others how to conduct their lives.

Danielle is no longer the serious and stable one of the group, and has sunk into a deep depression. Danielle almost gives up, then reaches for the positive Randy for help. It is symbolic that the person her friends made fun of is the one she calls in her time of need.

Julius is recovering well from his experience, and he and Marina are spending a lot of time together. Marina is displaying more strength of character.

The theme of taking them by surprise is now turned on Danielle, who sees Bootie in his new life.



Characters

Danielle Minkoff

Danielle Minkoff is a twenty-nine-year-old woman of Jewish descent, who lives in New York City and works as a television documentary producer. She is the major character in Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children*.

Danielle is of Jewish descent, small in stature, with dark hair, pale skin, olive shaped eyes, and large breasts. She was born in Columbus, Ohio. Her father is a contractor who still lives in Columbus, and her mother, Randy, is a real estate agent in Florida. Danielle has one brother who lives in Texas.

Danielle's studio apartment in the Village of New York City is very small but has a large window overlooking Manhattan. Her home is her sanctuary, and she keeps it neat and orderly, just as she prefers her life to be. Danielle's mother believes the studio to be too small for her to stay with Danielle when she is in town, and declares that the studio hardly looks inhabited. Danielle likes her apartment to look like a blank slate, and she rarely allows visitors into her sacred place.

Danielle is a lovely woman, but she constantly compares her looks and style with that of her best friend Marina Thwaite. The depth of this envy is shown during an evening at the Thwaite Manhattan house when Marina is daintily eating potato chips and Danielle is so intimidated that she decides not to eat any of them at all.

Danielle is portrayed as the strong one of the three friends, and she does serve as their best listener and strongest supporter. However, Danielle is a weak woman, easily swayed by others. When she is first around Ludo, his physical presence affects her so much she feels like an unwilling marionette. She wears an uncharacteristically brazen evening dress on Awards Night because Marina bullies her into doing so. She wonders if she unconsciously allows her mother to manipulate her. When she begins the affair with Murray, she thinks to herself: "Against her better judgment, she let him do it".

Danielle's mother embarrasses her in front of her friends, and Danielle compares her to the elegant style of the Thwaite family. Danielle is always covering up for the fact she is from a middle class background and is not a native New Yorker.

Danielle's taste in art leans towards the abstract, which is symbolic of her views of her own life. Her favorite picture in the Thwaite house is a large canvas of a wavering sea of golds and browns. Her only decoration in the apartment is a series of Rothko prints, with color, no shape. Danielle tends to be driven by emotion, and her life is one of waiting for the actions of others to propel her into action.

Her affair with Murray occurs almost immediately after Ludo chooses Marina as a lover instead of Danielle. Murray, thirty years her senior, is a cultural icon who she admires for



his ability to go out and do his thing. She feels safe with him, although the relationship is far from secure.

The novel begins with Danielle out of her element, on a business trip to Sydney. She meets Ludo and they plan to meet again in New York City when he moves there in a month. In the meantime, she fantasizes about him, and is obviously smitten with him. When she does see him again in New York City, he is still flirting with her, but she soon realizes he is just a charming man who has a way with ladies. His contempt of Murray is disturbing to Danielle, and she is amazed and hurt to see him court Murray's daughter, Marina.

In the midst of Marina's affair with Ludo and Julius's affair with David, Danielle allows Murray to sleep with her, and soon convinces herself she is in love with him. During their time together she feels she knows him and has a clear vision of him. This vision is rudely interrupted on the occasions when she must be at the Stockbridge home while Murray is with his wife and daughter. Danielle begins to feel she is just a diversion to Murray, and asserts herself by asking Murray to spend one night with her.

Murray grants this wish, but the night they chose was September 10, 2001, and the next morning they both watch from her apartment window as the terrorists slam two airplanes into the World Trade Center. The disaster for America becomes a personal disaster for Danielle when Murray hurries away, thinking only of his wife, Annabel.

In the weeks following the terrorist attacks, Danielle sinks deeper and deeper into depression. Her apartment is no longer her sanctuary, being defiled by the tragedy of Manhattan and the memories of abandonment of her lover. She sleeps constantly and accepts no invitations from her friends. Finally she decides to commit suicide.

Just before she takes the final pill, she calls her mother and asks for help. Danielle is whisked away from the broken skyline and gloom of Manhattan and taken to sunny Florida to heal. She thinks about moving to Florida, but realizes that even with Murray out of her life, she wants to live in New York City.

In Florida, she is taken by surprise to see Bootie Tubb, the rejected and clumsy relative of the Thwaites, who has transformed himself into Ulrich New. They share a brief moment, when they both acknowledged that they loved Murray and he was not the man they thought they knew.

In the novel, Danielle is confronted by a crisis of the heart and survives the attack on her city. Although she runs away from New York City when depressed, she realizes she wants to return to the city and to her job. She finds that Ludo is not the man she was initially attracted to, and her affair with Murray turns sour. At the end of the novel, she sees her mother in a better light, as someone strong and positive, and Danielle shows signs of admiring her mother rather than continuing to envy Marina.



Frederick Bootie Tubb

Frederick "Bootie" Tubb is a young man in his mid-twenties, six feet tall, overweight, and wears glasses. He is unmarried, lives with his mother, and is unemployed. Bootie has recently left college because it did not live up to his expectations, and is embarking on a self-study program of education.

Bootie is saddled with an unattractive nickname, he has a sloppy appearance, and he gives the impression of being befuddled with life. He did very well in high school, where his classmates called him the professor and he graduated as valedictorian. His mother, Judy, had high hopes for him to become a politician and more important than his famous uncle, Murray Thwaite.

Bootie has high expectations of the world, and is constantly amazed when the world and its inhabitants fail to live up to these expectations. Bootie embarks on paths in life, but with little or no planning and absolutely no thought to the consequences. It is not that he doesn't care about what happens; his thought process neglects to include thinking about what might happen when he takes action. For example, he moves from Watertown to Amherst and just sits for three weeks without a thought of how he is impacting his friend's household. He writes a damning expose about his uncle, and is utterly shocked when his uncle throws him out of the house and fires him.

The novel begins with Bootie living at home in Watertown. He moves to Amherst, where after three weeks he is gently but firmly encouraged to get a job or leave. He arrives in Manhattan and is taken in by the Thwaite family. When Murray gives him a job as a secretary, Bootie moves into Julius's recently vacated apartment.

Bootie arrives in New York City expecting to be a disciple at the foot of Murray, learning from the great man, and using Murray's direction to finish his self-study program. Bootie falls in love with Marina, who is so unaware of him that it takes her several weeks to remember to ask Julius about his apartment so Bootie can sublet it.

When Bootie opens Murray's private safe and begins reading the private manuscript, emails, and journals, he becomes tremendously disappointed in his uncle. When Marina asks Bootie to prepare an article for Ludo's upcoming revolutionary magazine, Bootie seizes this opportunity to make his new-found knowledge of the true Murray Thwaite public knowledge.

Bootie's new expectation is that Marina will read this expose and fall in love with him for revealing the truth. The consequences of his actions are that Marina is upset with him. Again, he is shocked at this outcome.

Bootie is shunned by the Thwaite family at the same time that Julius needs his apartment back, so Bootie must find a job and a new place to live. On the last day of August, he finds a tiny room in a rundown area of Brooklyn and moves his meager possessions there. He finds temporary employment, and is required to take the subway there.



On September 11, 2001, the attacks occur while Bootie is stuck in the subway, which makes him very claustrophobic. When he emerges from the underground, he encounters the thick gray smoke, New Yorkers wandering around in a daze, and he walks away from the city. He boards a bus and ends up in Florida.

Frederick "Bootie" Tubb changes his name to Ulrich New. He decides he is becoming a man with qualities, even as he is leaving Florida after the encounter with Danielle. He is a survivor.

Bootie's character is one of a seeker, someone who shuns the beaten path not boldly, but out of necessity because the normal ways just don't make sense to them. Bootie is intelligent but not with common sense. He heads off to the big city in a circuitous route, without his dress shoes, devoid of big city ways. He trusts those people he idolizes, and is overtly upset when they disappoint him.

Bootie's character undergoes the biggest transformation in this novel: he was a grown man being cared for and supported by his mother at the beginning, and becomes a man with a purpose.

Julius Clarke

Julius is a gay man approaching his thirties. He is the son of a fierce but gentle Marine from Danville, Michigan. In moving to New York City and attaching himself to Danielle and especially Marina, he has shed all that he ever was born to, striving to surround himself with the rich and powerful. He wants a long term relationship with someone, but that dream clashes violently with his addiction to chance sexual strangers. Julius comes away from his best chance of being part of a great gay couple scarred for life.

Julius has high aspirations to be rich and powerful, but would rather be with someone who has these qualities than cultivate them for himself. He reaches for the dignity and solidness of a relationship, but is unable to forsake the wild life.

Murray Thwaite

Murray is in his sixties, an attractive man with a presence. His world is composed of ironies: he is consulted by the media and the world for his opinions, but leans heavily on his wife. He has a beautiful, intelligent daughter, but he considers her silly and vain. He has difficulty relating to the needs of a troubled teenager, but feels capable of writing a book telling people how to live their lives. Murray has always had affairs, but when he begins one with Danielle, his daughter's best friend thirty years his junior, it begins a series of events that results in affecting many lives. Murray's status is challenged by Ludo and Bootie, one from hatred, the other from love.

Murray is a vain, egotistical man, who feels that his status and acquired wealth entitles him to always seek and receive more of everything. He keeps his wife on a pedestal while using other women for the satisfaction of his ego and vanity.



Ludovic Seeley

Ludo is Australian, a journalist, and approximately the same age as Danielle, Marina, and Julius. He is very handsome, slender, and has a style of dealing with women that makes them feel a special intimacy. He can be very charming, but his life goal appears to be intent upon disturbing the way people view the world. His new magazine, *The Monitor*, will be his vehicle to create this revolution of thought. He casually courts Danielle until he meets Marina and marries her; however, the thrust of his conversations with Marina concern separating her from the teachings of her father. When Ludo's magazine becomes one of the victims of 9/11, he disappears from the novel and perhaps Marina's life.

Ludo sees himself as a sort of Napoleon, bringing clarity and revolution to the masses. Ironically, for someone who claims to bring clarity, he more often brings consternation with his disturbing remarks.

Annabel Thwaite

Murray's wife is a lawyer and a compassionate citizen of New York City. She befriends everyone who needs her, and in this novel, everyone seems to need her for support. Murray and Marina revolve around her, looking to her for strength. Indeed, she is the one who gets things done. In each scene of the novel where Annabel is included, she is busy doing something: cooking, driving, planning the wedding, preparing coffee. Murray thinks and writes about the world, and Annabel does something in it.

Marina Thwaite

Marina Thwaite is almost thirty, beautiful and rich. She modeled in her early twenties and was signed to write a book seven years before the novel begins. At this point in her life, the manuscript is unfinished, her boyfriend of five years has left her for another woman, and she has moved home to live with her mother and father. At the beginning of the novel, Marina is the most unsettled of the three, but by the end of the novel, she is in an established relationship, she has finished her novel, and it is Danielle who has fallen apart.

Randy Minkoff

Randy is Danielle's mother, a divorcee who moved from Columbus to St. Petersburg and became a very successful real estate agent. She is full of life, and although Marina considers her fun but tacky, Randy is solid and positive. She is free with her views on how Danielle should live her life, but basically just wants her daughter to be happy. When the going gets tough, Randy is the one who rescues Danielle.



Judy Tubb

Murray's sister chose to stay in Watertown instead of moving to the big city. She marries, becomes a schoolteacher, has two children, and becomes a widow, all in Watertown. Judy represents the common life, free of fame and free of New York City. She follows time honored routines, and even on 9/11 when the country is in shambles and shock, she keeps her hairdresser appointment. She dotes upon her son, Bootie, and when she believes Bootie is dead, she places all the blame upon Murray. To Judy, Murray represented a chance for Bootie to become great; when Bootie's essay angers Murray, and Murray send him away, Judy sees Murray's vanity as the cause of her beloved son's death.

David Cohen

David is everything Julius has ever wanted in a relationship. He is a successful businessman, appears to be stable, wealthy, possessive, and strong. David wants him and Julius to be a great gay couple. Although David is from a wealthy family in Scarsdale, he is quickly out of funds when he loses his job, and his possessiveness turns violent when he catches Julius with another man.

His character is not fully examined by the author, but is in keeping with the theme of taking them by surprise when he changes from a petty, mild mannered and somewhat boring man into a jealous, vindictive and cruel man at the end of the relationship.

Aurora

The longtime maid for the Thwaite family is not described physically by the author, but Aurora is very observant, and not as enamored by Murray as everyone else.

DeVaughn

DeVaughn is a troubled black teenager who is befriended by Annabel. He is shunned by Murray at first, but after 9/11, when it is revealed that DeVaughn's mother is one of the tower victims, Murray relents somewhat. DeVaughn's character is not fleshed out by the author, and instead serves as an example of Murray's view of the world and how he treats those of its inhabitants who are not in his intellectual status.



Objects/Places

Murray's Office

Murray's office is the "inner sanctum" of the Thwaite house, symbolizing Murray's own vision of himself. No one is allowed to come in without permission, and when they are allowed in, nothing can be touched or rearranged. The contents of the study are cluttered, with manuscripts, post-it notes, and newspaper clippings all treated as holy relics by Murray, his family, and Bootie, just as is Murray's highly esteemed mind. The truth about the office is revealed, however, by Aurora, the maid, who describes the office as full of stinking cigarettes and a half-empty bottle of whiskey in one of the drawers. Bootie reveals the truth about Murray's mind by exposing Murray's affairs, his re-hashing of his own past writings, and basically becoming a hollow monument. The study has a window overlooking Manhattan, as does Murray's mind. But once ideas, the sun, and more enter the study, they are not to be moved or examined in any way. Murray's office is completely controlled by him.

Danielle's Studio Apartment

Danielle considers herself a New Yorker, and her tiny apartment allows her to survey Manhattan "like a captain at the prow of her ship". Her studio is so tiny that her mother cannot stay comfortably there when she visits. Danielle lives by routine tidiness to accommodate the small spaces. There is a large, south facing window that reveals a beautiful view of the city, and on September 11th, a horrific view of the terrorist attacks. She has arranged her little home to allow the sitting area near the window, so her bed is near the kitchen and door. The décor in the studio reflects Danielle's own view of herself as a serious thinker. There are no photos, collectibles, or mementos displayed, contributing to her own view that she is simple and pure.

She is somewhat embarrassed that her books and CD's are not elitist but rather mainstream, but that is alleviated by her simple Rothko abstract reproductions, predominantly displayed on one wall.

After the attacks and Murray's abandonment, Danielle no longer feels safe in her tiny sanctuary, and needs to be rescued from there.

Stockbridge Family House

This is the Thwaite family retreat from the city. It is antique in style, but modern and very solid in construction. It is a large home, indicative of the wealth of the Thwaite family. Marina retreats to the Stockbridge House in March, when she is still finding her identity, and feels paranoid and afraid there. Yet by July, she has regained enough confidence to choose Stockbridge as the site for her September wedding to Ludo. During the Fourth of July storm, the house provides an analogy of the Thwaite family in the midst of



turmoil. It is so strong and well made that the inhabitants cannot feel or hear the raging stormy weather outside, and are only aware of it as they watch from the safe and warm living room.

Watertown Home of Judy and Bootie Tubb

The home is described as spacious but crumbling, which represents Judy's life and in some ways, Bootie himself. It is the place where Bootie was born and where his father died. Bootie does nothing to care for the house, so Judy cleans, tidies, and loves the old house all on her own. Bootie feels safe there, but ultimately escapes it just as he escapes his mother's smothering love.

Julius's Pitt Street Apartment

Although the apartment belongs to Julius, it is not described to the reader until Bootie has sublet it from him. The apartment represents Juilius's secret and dangerous sexual alliances: seedy, dark, insect ridden. It represents Bootie's life: empty, mostly dirty, and unimpressive. When David and Julius move back into the tiny apartment, the claustrophobic atmosphere increases the level of discomfort between the couple.

Manhattan

Marina is the most at ease with the city, having been born and raised there. Murray, Danielle, and Julius were raised in other towns, but have completely immersed themselves into their chosen home town. The city represents America in this novel, full of intelligent, creative, and progressive people who are comfortable with their lives. When Manhattan is hit on September 11th, they are taken completely by surprise.

Bootie's Dress Shoes

Bootie never wears these shoes in the novel, but they are symbolic by their absence as he sets out to conquer the world. Bootie goes to meet his idol, attends a Manhattan society event, and applies for a job, all in his dirty sneakers. When Bootie is believed to be dead, Judy looks at the forgotten shoes as a symbol of the bright promise Bootie's future held.

Thwaite Manhattan House

This house, with its prestigious address, elegant furnishings, and spacious rooms represent the status and wealth of Murray Thwaite. It is the sanctuary of Murray and Annabel; although Murray prefers to think of it as his own domain, it is Annabel who opens its doors to her drifting daughter, Bootie, and eventually to DeV Vaughn.



Murray's Secret Manuscript

This manuscript represents Murray's ego. He has decided that his wealth of experience and considerable wisdom obligates him to write a book instructing the less fortunate on how to live. This is his secret project, and his pride and joy. Because of Bootie's expose, Murray is on the brink of having the details of his manuscript and parts of his life published in Ludo's magazine; however, the events of 9/11 eliminate not only the magazine but the expose's author as well. A few months later, after being sought out by the media and once again exalted as a great American pundit, Murray returns to the belief that he is entitled and even obligated to publish the manuscript after all.

Florida

Danielle's mother, Randy, chooses to move to the Sunshine State when she divorces, and it suits her positive outlook. When Danielle's depression hits its darkest depth, she is whisked away from gloomy, broken Manhattan to the warm beaches of Florida. Bootie is reborn in Florida as Ulrich New. In this novel, Florida is represented as a land where dreams are realized and spirits are lifted.

Marina's Book

When Marina was in her early twenties and a successful sought after model, she was signed to write a fashion book about children's clothes. In the intervening years before the novel, Marina's initial ideas and notes have grown stale, much as her personal life has begun to drift. She begins to work seriously on the manuscript only when Ludo encourages her, and the subject morphs from a fashion book into a social commentary on how people dress their children. The true example of how Marina has grown in the novel is represented by her behavior in March, when she goes to her father for guidance; and then in July, when Murray tells her the finished project is unworthy of publication. The Marina of March would never had been able to face down her father's criticism and go ahead with publication.

Themes

The Emperor Has No Clothes

The emperor the author is referring to in this novel could be Murray Thwaite, Ludo Seeley, or Manhattan itself. The theme reflects a person or entity confident of its superiority, of its elevated status in the world, and of the moment when its false pride is revealed and exposed to the world.

The tailor who crafts the invisible outfit for Murray and Manhattan would be the American public, especially those residing in Manhattan.

The small boys in the crowd who point out Murray's emptiness are Ludo and Bootie. The crowd members who are the most affected by this exposure are Danielle and Marina.

Murray Thwaite is a sixty-year-old journalistic icon who was born in Watertown, attended Harvard, and made New York City his home. In his youth, he worked in the anti-Vietnam movement, and continued his political activism throughout his life. He writes articles and books regarding American and world politics, and teaches at NYU and Columbia when asked. Late in his career, he decides to begin secretly working on a manuscript that is completely different from his regular work: a tome that instructs normal people how to live their lives. When Bootie finds this manuscript locked away, he feels it is his duty to read it. Bootie is shocked at the facts that are uncovered in this work: Murray has repeatedly re-used his own articles and passed them off as fresh; Murray is instructing others how to conduct their lives, but he is cold and indifferent to the poor, is having an affair with his daughter's best friend, and presenting himself as someone Murray definitely is not.

Ludo views the world in a way completely different from normal society. Everywhere he looks he sees naked emperors, although he believes himself to be Napoleon in nature. He sees Napoleon not as an emperor per se, but as a revolutionary whose ideas are relevant in today's society. Ludo constantly attacks Murray as a hollow monument and goes as far as marrying the man's daughter so he can get closer to the enemy. In the novel, all of Ludo's attacks against Murray take place in conversations with Marina and Danielle. The only conversation in the book between Murray and Ludo is brief, and does not involve a confrontation at all. At dinner that same night, Ludo begins his tirade about society in a conversation with Annabel, and Murray is rising to anger when Marina distracts everyone with another subject. Ludo is ineffective in his attempts to bring Murray down, but does influence Marina considerably in her thinking of her own father.

Bootie is definitely the small boy in the crowd in this book. Although physically large, he is made small by the towering status and wealth of the Thwaite family, and treated as insignificant by Danielle and Julius. Bootie's expose on Murray is the cry of "the emperor is wearing no clothes" to Judy, Murray, and Marina.



The city of Manhattan could also represent the emperor. Shining, bright, with the world's largest buildings scraping the sky, the city seems perfect and beautiful throughout the novel, and especially during Danielle's helicopter ride on September 10th. But the next morning, the terrorist attacks show just how vulnerable and fragile the city actually is.

The Rich are Different

The rich and entitled in this book are the Thwaite family, David Cohen and his family, and Manhattan. The characters standing outside of that enchanted circle and wanting desperately to be part of it are Julius, Danielle, and Bootie. The characters who are happy with their own lives are Judy Tubb, Annabel Thwaite, and Randy Minkoff.

The entitled conduct their lives differently, and act as though they are in charge of the world and its inhabitants. Murray's attitude towards those who are not in his socio-economic strata is that they are less than worthy of his attention. Marina is blissfully unaware of her status, since she was born and raised to it. Bootie desperately needs a place to live and asks Marina to ask Julius about his apartment, but the urgency is lost on Marina, who forgets for weeks.

Annabel is aware of the discrepancy between rich and poor, and has dedicated her life to bridging the gap. Judy Tubb had the same opportunities as her brother Murray, but chose to remain in Watertown, making her happy life there. Randy Minkoff loves New York, but finds it a place to visit, not live. Randy sees New York's coldness of spirit, and prefers sunny Florida.

Julius is openly hungry for power and wealth. He wants the lifestyle of the rich gay playboy, and has created a persona that matches that goal. He was born to a Marine family in Danville, Indiana, and has taken great pains to remove himself from that background over the years. He runs to Marina's side when she calls, and hides the fact that he is supporting himself by working as a clerk for a temp agency. Julius's relationship with David Cohen is a direct result of Julius's desire to rise in status.

Danielle enters into an affair with Murray as part of her desire to align herself with the rich and famous. She openly admires the Thwaite status, and envies Marina on every level. Throughout the novel she compares her short stature and normal good looks to Marina's tall, willowy, stunning appearance.

Bootie is attracted to the wealth of intelligence he believes Murray to have. Murray represents success to Bootie, and he goes to Manhattan to dedicate his life to Murray in return for a discipleship.

In this novel, none of those who seek wealth, status or love from the rich actually receive it. Danielle momentarily enjoys Murray's love and attention, but when the crisis of the terrorist attacks occur, he abandons her for his wife and home. Julius is allowed entry into David's family and luxurious lifestyle, but when the true Julius is revealed, David attacks and leaves. Bootie is welcomed into the Thwaite home as a temporary



guest, but when he reveals the truth about Murray, Bootie is cast far away and forgotten by the Thwaites.

The rich do not fare well in this novel either. Murray is able to convince himself that nothing has changed in his life, but his daughter will never look upon him the same way. Murray does change somewhat in his attitude towards the less fortunate, as he accepts DeVaughn into his home. Marina enters into a loveless marriage, but gains new insight into her life and begins to show signs of strength. David Cohen loses his job and his apartment, but is admitted back into the family home after ridding himself of Julius.

Taking the World by Surprise

In the short story about the emperor with no clothes, the crowd and the emperor are taken by surprise when the small boy in the crowd points out the emperor's nakedness. The crowd and the emperor are deluded into not seeing the obvious. In this novel, almost every character becomes deluded by a situation, then their delusion is swept away by a revelation.

The theme of surprise is visited often in this novel by the character's intention or by a result.

Ludo intends to take the world by surprise with his revolutionary magazine, *The Monitor*, and to surprise Murray by turning his daughter against him. Ludo himself is surprised when the terrorist attacks destroy the magazine's future.

Danielle does not like surprises, but receives several during the novel: 1) Ludo chooses Marina over her; 2) Murray abandons her for his wife; 3) her view of Manhattan is destroyed by terrorists; and most importantly, 4) her rescuer turns out to be her mother.

Bootie is clueless, so therefore surprised by the outcome of his actions at every turn. When Bootie begins to work for Murray, Murray tells Bootie his first life lesson is to take them by surprise. Bootie surprises his mother by leaving Watertown and never returning. He surprises Marina and Murray by writing an honest expose of Murray. He surprises Danielle by being alive in Florida instead of perishing in the tower attacks. He surprises himself by pulling himself out of the rut he was in, and becoming a man with qualities.

Marina surprises everyone by finishing her manuscript. She surprises Murray by continuing with her plans to publish it after he deems it unworthy.

Manhattan is surprised, as all of America was, by the attacks on its own soil, and the rapid destruction of its own World Trade Center.

The theme of surprise, and how after a surprise people look back at the circumstances and realize events and actions were leading to exactly what happened, is recurrent in this novel. America knew about Osama and his threats, but never expected the threats to actualize. Danielle knew an affair with Murray was ill-fated, but deluded herself into

ignoring the risk. Julius knew cheating on David would result in a showdown, yet was shocked when it finally occurred. Marina is advised by Ludo that Murray would downplay her manuscript and success, yet is devastated when she hears Murray say it is unworthy.

Style

Style

Point of View

Messud's *The Emperor's Children* is told in first person, with the point of view changing from character to character. The author predominantly shows the reader the view of the main characters: Danielle, Murray, Marina, Julius, and Bootie throughout the novel, with few exceptions. In one chapter, Aurora, the Thwaite's household maid, is featured, and in three other chapters, Bootie's mother Judy is highlighted. Although Ludovic, David, and Annabel's actions are critical to the novel, the reader is never presented a chapter from their points of view.

When the author groups several chapters together under similarly named titles, these chapters bounce from Danielle to Murray to Marina to Julius in short bursts, as if the reader were catching little slices of life from each character.

Setting

The first chapter of the novel is set in Sydney, Australia, but the bulk of the setting is in Manhattan in 2001. The novel ends in Florida. The time is 2001, pre-9/11, and focuses mainly on the upper crust of society in Manhattan.

Much of the action and conversation in the novel takes place in either the Thwaite home in Manhattan or Stockbridge, Danielle's studio apartment, or wherever Bootie is residing in that chapter. Manhattan looms just outside the door, or above the subway. Each home has its specific setting: the quiet elegance of the Manhattan Thwaite house, the tiny but tidy studio apartment for Danielle, the disgusting Pitt Street apartment, the solidly constructed Thwaite vacation residence in Stockbridge.

Language and Meaning

The vocabulary in this novel is well above the standard usage, and the average reader will find the need to have a dictionary handy while reviewing this book. This use of language is a tool by the author to display the high intelligence of Murray Thwaite, and to emphasize the richness of his environs. Chapters involving Judy, Aurora, or Randy employ a simpler tone, as these characters represent the people who have chosen a more down-to-earth life.

Bootie's use of language refers more to his hero Emerson, and Bootie's attempts to self-educate. In his chapters he seeks to find meaning in Manhattan, or in Murray's manuscript, but he comes away from this experience none the wiser.



Conversations between Julius, Danielle, and Marina are shallow, revolving around who did what, and not about ideas or goals. These thirty-something characters are chatty friends, but are seldom emotionally available to their friends when needed.

Structure

The novel is 479 pages long, broken down into sixty-seven chapters, divided into four parts: March, May, July, and September, representing months in the year 2001. Each chapter is titled and presented in a different main character's point of view. Many of the chapters are very short, but the ones containing Bootie's point of view are the longest in the novel.

The plot of the novel is basically about the lives of three college friends living in Manhattan, who are approaching thirty; there are several subplots as well. Bootie, a recent graduate and relative of a famous thinker and writer, struggles to find his place in the world with disastrous and life changing results. Murray's influence on his wife, daughter, nephew, son-in-law, and lover presents an intriguing story of an aging icon who is struggling to maintain his status.



Quotes

"It all came down to entitlement, and one's sense of it. Marina, feeling entitled, never really asked herself if she was good enough. Whereas he, Julius, asked himself repeatedly, answered always in the affirmative, and marveled at the wider world's apparent inability to see the light." Chap. 4, p. 33

"Or maybe that wasn't quite right: maybe Marina was so busy bucking herself up that she had forgotten, or never noticed, that she was standing on nothing, poised in the void." Chap. 6, p. 49

"I never told my daughter to become a writer. Quite the opposite. I figure, if you can do something else, do. Because it's a stimulating life, but an uncertain one. I did bring her up though to understand that integrity is everything, it's all you've got. And that if you have a voice, a gift, you're morally bound to exploit it." Chap. 7, p. 55

"It was like Zeon's paradox, the arrow that can never reach its destination, ever closer but never there. But for Julius, his arrow didn't even know its destination, knew only that it wanted one." Chap. 20, p. 162

"But can't we just tell the truth about it for one minute? Look at all these preening clowns, dolled up in their Sunday best, everyone wanting to be more important than the next guy - it's gross." Chap. 21, p. 167

Chapter 31, Page 238, Bootie Tubb

"He would have given a great deal to return to a state of blissful ignorance where Murray was concerned. Every revelation only diminished further his uncle's fading glow."

Chapter 38, Page 289, Bootie Tubb

"They had all seemed witty and he'd felt as though he were slightly deaf, or listening to a language he knew only imperfectly, as though he were missing phrases, references, piecing together a brightly colored, impressionistic whole from only partial information."

Chapter 44, Page 327, Marina Thwaite

"Was this what it meant to grow up, this vast loneliness? And like her anger in the restaurant - that beautifully somber place, now forever spoiled for her - she could control the feeling, push it to one side, just as she could brush away the tears before the lights were turned back on; but she did not know if the force of it would ever abate."



Chapter 59, Page 418, Ludovic Seeley

"This is what we should have a cover piece about, this', he went on in an apparent seething fury. 'About how in this country everybody wants a happy ending. To the point of dishonesty, as if sticking up these posters can somehow undo, or fix, or change what's just happened. Who's going to say to them, 'Go home and face the facts! Your son, mother, niece is dead, dust, gone. There's nothing left?'"

"She'd taken the epitaph for Bootie's stone from a much older grave, at the other end of the grounds, and didn't mind repeating it because it was so true; 'Here is not a life, but a piece of childhood thrown away'. He'd had everything ahead, and his uncle to surpass. He'd had a future." Chap. 63, p. 446

"Since then, Danielle had been peculiar, elusive, had gone into therapy, was on antidepressants, now doubtless like half of the city; but more than that, Marina felt that she had lost her, that the Danielle she had always known had been vacuumed out and only a flat, monosyllabic shell remained." Chap. 64, p. 450

"He'd walked home, on the eleventh, and had taken a shower and gone to his study and waited, aware that in his actuarial efforts he had miscalculated. His desire to be with Annabel was ultimately never in question; she was his life." Chap. 65, p. 456

Topics for Discussion

Who is the "emperor" in this novel? Ludo or Murray?

How does the character of Marina grow during this novel? How does the character of Danielle deteriorate?

The author devotes considerable pages to Bootie Tubb. Why is this?

In what way are the three friends behaving like the emperor with no clothes? What incidents in each of their lives represent the moment when someone says, "The emperor has no clothes"?

Why does Murray change his mind about publishing his secret manuscript?

Does Murray view the people in his life as how they can reflect upon him and his status? What are examples of this?

Why does Ludo resent Murray so much?

Does Murray view the people in his life as instruments to reflect well upon him and his status? What are examples of this?