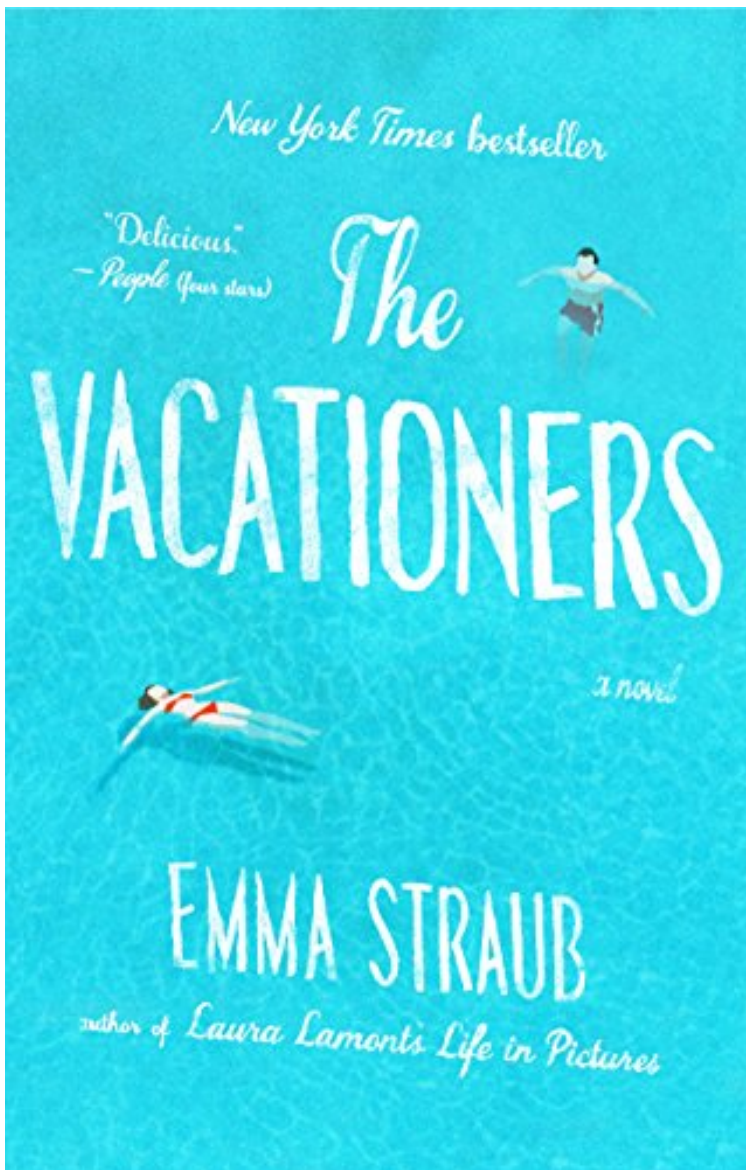


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# The Vacationers: A Novel



Par Emma Straub  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur"Delicious . . . richly riveting . . . The Vacationers offers all the delights of a fluffy, read-it-with-sunglasses-on-the-beach read, made substantial by the exceptional wit, insight, intelligence and talents of its author.People (four stars)An irresistible, deftly observed novel from the New York Times-bestselling author of Modern Lovers,about the secrets, joys, and jealousies that rise to the surface over the course of an American familys two-week stay in Mallorca. For the Posts, a two-week trip to the Balearic island of Mallorca with their extended family and friends is a celebration: Franny and Jim are observing their thirty-fifth wedding anniversary, and their daughter, Sylvia, has graduated from high school. The sunlit island, its mountains and beaches, its tapas and tennis courts, also promise an escape from the tensions

simmering at home in Manhattan. But all does not go according to plan: over the course of the vacation, secrets come to light, old and new humiliations are experienced, childhood rivalries resurface, and ancient wounds are exacerbated. This is a story of the sides of ourselves that we choose to show and those we try to conceal, of the ways we tear each other down and build each other up again, and the bonds that ultimately hold us together. With wry humor and tremendous heart, Emma Straub delivers a richly satisfying story of a family in the midst of a maelstrom of change, emerging irrevocably altered yet whole. From the Hardcover edition. Excerpt \*\*\*This excerpt is from an advance uncorrected proof.\*\*\* Copyright 2014 by Emma

Straub Day One Leaving always came as a surprise, no matter how long the dates had been looming on the calendar. Jim had packed his suitcase the night before, but now, moments before their scheduled departure, he was wavering. Had he packed enough books? He walked back and forth in front of the bookshelf in his office, pulling novels out by their spines and then sliding them back into place. Had he packed his running shoes? Had he packed his shaving cream? Elsewhere in the house, Jim could hear his wife and their daughter

in similar last-minute throes of panic, running up and down the stairs with one last item that had been forgotten in a heap by the door. There were things that Jim would have taken out of his bags, if it had been possible: the last year of his life, and the five before that, when it came to his knees; the way Franny looked at him across the dinner table at night; the feeling of himself inside a new mouth for the first time in three decades, and how much he wanted to stay there; the emptiness waiting on the other side of the return flight, the blank days he would have to fill and fill and fill. Jim sat down at his desk and waited for someone to tell

him that he was needed elsewhere. Sylvia waited in front of the house, staring down 75th Street, toward Central Park. Both of her parents were the type that believed that a taxi would always present itself at just the right moment, especially on summer weekends, when traffic in the city was lightest. Sylvia thought that was horseshit. The only thing worse than spending two of her last six weeks before leaving for college on vacation with her parents would be missing the flight and having to spend one of those final nights sleeping upright in an airport lounge, a stained seat cushion as her only comfort. She would get the taxi herself. It

wasn't as if she wanted to spend the whole summer in Manhattan, which turned into a melting concrete armpit. The idea of Mallorca was appealing, in theory: it was an island, which promised little waves and nice breezes, and she could practice her Spanish, which she had done well in during high school.

Everyone literally everyone from her graduating class was doing nothing all summer long, just taking turns hosting parties when their parents went to Wainscott or Woodstock or somewhere else with wood-shingled houses that looked distressed on purpose. Sylvia had looked at their faces enough for the last eighteen years, and couldn't wait to get the hell out. Sure, yes, there were four other kids from her class going to Brown, but she never had to speak to them again if she didn't want to, and that was the plan. Find new friends. Make a new life. Finally be somewhere where the name Sylvia Post came without the ghosts of the girl she'd been at sixteen, at twelve, at five, where she was detached from her parents and her brother and she could just be, like an astronaut floating in space, unencumbered by gravity. Come to think of it, Sylvia wished that they were spending the whole summer abroad. This way, she would still have to suffer through August at home, when the parties were sure to reach their weepy and desperate apex. Sylvia did not plan to weep. A taxi with its light on rounded the corner and came slowly toward her, bouncing its way over the potholes. Sylvia stuck one arm in the air and dialed her home phone number with her other hand. It rang and rang, and was ringing still when the taxi came to a halt. Her parents were inside, doing god knows what. Sylvia opened the door to the taxi and leaned into the backseat. It'll just be a minute, she said. Sorry. My parents are on their way out.

She paused. They're the worst. This had not always been true, but it was now, and she wasn't shy about saying so. The taxi driver nodded and clicked the meter on, clearly happy to sit there all day, if need be. The cab would have been blocking traffic, but there was no traffic to block. Sylvia was the only person in the city who seemed to be in a hurry. She hit redial, and this time her father answered after the first ring. Let's go, she said, without waiting for him to speak. Cars here. Your mother is taking her time, Jim said. We'll be out in five. Sylvia clicked the phone off and scooped her way across the backseat of the taxi. They're on their way, she said. Sylvia leaned back and closed her eyes, feeling some of her hair catch on a piece of duct tape that was holding the seat together. It seemed like a genuine possibility that only one of her parents would come out of the house, and that would be it, the whole thing wrapped up like a shitty soap opera, with no satisfying resolution. The meter ticked away, and they sat in silence, Sylvia and the taxi driver, for ten whole minutes. When Franny and Jim finally came bustling out of the house, the horns of all the cars now stalled behind the cab acted as a processional march, scolding and triumphant. Franny slid in next to her daughter, and Jim sat up front, the knees of his khakis pressing against the dashboard. Sylvia was neither happy nor unhappy to

have both of her parents in the taxi, but she did experience a moment of relief, not that she would have admitted it out loud. On y va! Franny said, pulling the door shut behind her. Thats French, Sylvia said. Were going to Spain. Andale! Franny was already perspiring, and she fanned at her armpits with their passports. She was wearing her traveling outfit, carefully honed over flights and train rides in all corners of the world: a pair of black leggings, a black cotton tunic that reached her knees, and a gauzy scarf to keep her warm on the airplane. When Sylvia once asked her mother about her immutable travel habits, her mother spat back, At least I dont travel with a handle of whiskey like Joan Didion. When people asked what kind of writer her mother was, Sylvia usually said that she was like Joan Didion, only with an appetite, or like Ruth Reichl, but with an attitude problem. She did not say this to her mother. The taxi pulled forward. No, no, no, Franny said, yanking her body toward the plexiglass divider. Make a left here, then left again on Central Park West. We want to go to the airport, not New Jersey. Thank you. She sank back against the seat. Some people, she said quietly, and stopped there. No one said anything for the rest of the ride, except to answer which airline they were flying to Madrid. Sylvia always liked driving to the airport, because it meant traveling through a whole different part of the city, as separate from the corner she knew as Hawaii from the rest of the United States.

There were detached houses and chain-link fences and abandoned lots, and kids riding their bikes in the street. It seemed like the kind of place people drove their cars to, which thrilled Sylvia to no end. Having a car sounded like something out of the movies. Her parents had had a car when she was little, but it grew creaky and expensive in the garage, and theyd finally sold it when she was still too young to appreciate what a luxury it was. Now whenever Franny or Jim spoke to someone who kept a car in Manhattan, they reacted with quiet horror, like people whod been subjected to the rantings of a mentally ill person at a cocktail party. Jim did his exercise walk around Terminal 7. He walked, or ran, for an hour every morning, and he didnt see why today should be any exception. It was something he and his son had in common, the need to move their bodies, to feel strong. Franny and Sylvia were quite content to sloth themselves into oblivion, to ossify on the sofa with a book or the godforsaken television blasting away. He could hear their muscles beginning to atrophy, but then, miraculously, they could still walk, and did, when properly motivated. Jims usual route took him into Central Park, up to the reservoir, then across and back down the east side of the park, looping around the boathouse on his way home. The terminal had no such scenery to speak of, and no wildlife, save the few confused birds that had snuck their way in and were now trapped at JFK forever, chirping at one another about airplanes and misery. Jim kept his elbows high and his pace brisk. He was always astonished at how slowly people moved at airportsit was like being held captive in a shopping mall, all wide asses and deranged children. There were a few leashes, which Jim actually appreciated, though in conversation he would agree with Franny that such things were degrading. In practice, parents yanked their children out of Jims path, and he walked on and on, past the Hudson News and the sports bar, all the way to the Au Bon Pain and back. The moving sidewalks were too crowded with luggage, so Jim walked just beside them, his long legs nearly beating the motorized track. Jim had previously been to Spain on three occasions: in 1970, when he graduated from high school and spent the summer bumming around Europe with his best friend; in 1977, when he and Franny were newlyweds and could barely afford to go and had nothing but the very best ham sandwiches in the world; and then in 1992, when Bobby was eight, and theyd had to go to bed early every night, which meant they didnt eat a proper dinner for a week, except for what they ordered in from room service, which was about as authentically Spanish as a hamburguesa. Who knew what Spain would be like now, its economic situation almost as tender as the Greeks. Jim walked past their assigned gate and saw Franny and Sylvia deeply engaged in their books, sitting next to each other but not speaking, as comfortable being silent as only family members can be. Despite the many reasons not to, it was good that they were making this trip, he and Franny agreed. In the fall, Sylvia would be in Providence, smoking clove cigarettes with boys from her French cinema class, as far away from her parents as if she were in another galaxy. Her older brother, Bobby, now waist-deep in swampy Floridian real estate, had done it, too. At first, the separations seemed impossible, like severing a limb, but then it was off, and walking, and running, and now Jim could hardly remember what it was like to have Bobby under his roof. He hoped he would never feel that way about Sylvia, but he guessed that he would, and sooner than he might admit. The greater fear was that when Sylvia was gone, and the whole world began to be dismantled, brick by brick, that the time they had all spent together would seem like a fantasy, someone elses comfortably imperfect life. It would be all of them in Mallorca: he and Franny, Sylvia, Bobby and Carmen, his albatross of a girlfriend, and Frannys dear friend Charles and his boyfriend, Lawrence. Husband. They were married now, Jim sometimes forgot. They had all rented a house thirty minutes outside of Palma from Gemma Something-or-other, a British

woman Franny knew a bit, an old friend of Charless. The place looked clean in the photographs Gemma had sent via e-mail, sparsely furnished but with a good eye: white walls, odd rock clusters on the mantel, low leather sofas. The woman was in the art world, like Charles, and relaxed about having strangers in her house in a way that felt distinctly European, which made the whole exchange remarkably easy. All Jim and Fran had had to do was send a check, and it was all settled, the house and garden and swimming pool and a local Spanish tutor for Sylvia. Charles told them that Gemma would have been equally likely to let them have the house for nothing at all, but it was better this way, and a million times simpler than preparing Sylvia for summer camp had been those years ago. Two weeks was enough time, a good solid chunk. It had been a month since Jims last day at Gallant, and the days had passed so slowly, dripping in molasses, sticking to every possible surface, unwilling to let go. Two weeks away would make Jim feel like he had made a change and chosen this new, free life, like so many people his age did. He was still slim at sixty, pale blond hair still mostly intact, if a bit thin. It had always been thin, though, as Franny sometimes said when she caught Jim patting it in the mirror. He could run as many miles as he could at forty, and he could tie a bow tie in under a minute. All told, he thought he was in pretty good shape. Two weeks away was just what he needed. Jim circled back around to the gate and let himself drop into the seat next to Franny, which made her shift on her bottom, swiveling her hips slightly so that her crossed legs were pointing toward Sylvia. Franny was reading Don Quixote for her book club, a group of women she despised, and she made little clucking noises as she read, perhaps anticipating the mediocre discussion that would follow. Have you really not read it before? Jim asked. When I was in college. Who remembers? Franny flipped the page. Its funny, I think, Sylvia said. Her parents turned to look at her. We read it in the fall. Its funny and pathetic. Sort of like Waiting for Godot, you know? Mm-hmm, Franny said, looking back to the book. Jim made eye contact with Sylvia over Frannys head and rolled his eyes. The flight would board soon, and then theyd be suspended in air. Having a daughter whose company he actually enjoyed was one of Jims favorite accomplishments. The odds were against you, in all matters of family planning. You couldnt choose to have a boy or a girl; you couldnt choose to have a child who favored you over the other parent. You could only accept what came along naturally, and Sylvia had done just that, ten years after her brother. Bobby liked to use the word accident, but Jim and Franny preferred the word surprise, like a birthday party filled with balloons. They had been surprised, that much was true. The woman at the gate picked up her microphone and announced the pre-boarding call. Franny closed her book and immediately began to gather her belongings she liked to be among the first on board, as if she would have to elbow someone else for her assigned seat. It was the principle, Franny said. She wanted to get where she was going as quickly as possible, not like all these other lollygaggers who seemed like theyd be just as happy to stay in the airport forever, buying overpriced bottles of water and magazines they would eventually abandon in a seat pocket. Jim and Franny sat side by side in reclining pods, seats that lowered almost completely flat, with Franny at the window and Jim on the aisle. Franny traveled enough to accrue the kind of frequent-flier miles that would make lesser women weep with envy, but she would have gladly paid for the larger seats regardless. Sylvia was thirty rows behind them, in coach. Teenagers and younger children did not need to sit in business class, let alone first that was Frannys philosophy. The extra room was for people who could appreciate it, truly appreciate it, and she did. Sylvias bones were still pliable she could easily contort herself into a comfortable enough shape to fall asleep. Franny didnt give it another thought. The plane was somewhere over the ocean, and the dramatic sunset had already completed its pink-and-orange display. The world was dark, and Jim stared over Frannys shoulder at the vast nothingness. Franny took sleeping pills, so that she could wake up feeling rested and have a leg up on the inevitable jet lag. She swallowed the Ambien earlier than usual, immediately following takeoff, and was now fast asleep, snoring with her parted lips toward the window, her padded silk eye mask tethered to her head with a taut elastic band. Jim unbuckled his seat belt and stood up to stretch his legs. He walked to the back of the first-class cabin and pulled aside the curtain to peer at the rest of the plane. Sylvia was so far back that he couldnt see her from where he stood, so he walked farther, and farther, until he could make her out. Hers was the only light on in the last several rows of the plane, and Jim found himself climbing over sleeping passengers socked feet as he made his way to his daughter. Hey, he said, putting his hand on the seat in front of Sylvias. She had her earbuds in, and nodded to the music, creating a shadow on the open pages of her notebook. She was writing, and hadnt noticed him approach. Jim touched her on the shoulder. Startled, she looked up and yanked the white cord, pulling the headphones out. Tiny streams of music, unrecognizable to him, poured out of her lap. Sylvia hit an invisible button, and the music stopped. She folded her notebook closed and then crossed her wrists on top of it, further blocking her fathers vision of her

most intimate inner thoughts. Hey, she said. Whats up? Not much, Jim said, crouching down to an uncomfortable squat, his back braced against the seat across the aisle. Sylvia didnt like seeing her fathers body in unusual positions. She didnt like to think about the fact that her father had a body at all. Not for the first time in the last few months, Sylvia wished that her wonderful father, whom she loved very much, was in an iron lung and able to be moved only when someone else was nice enough to wheel him around. Mom asleep? Of course. Are we there yet? Jim smiled. Few more hours. Not so bad. Maybe you should try to sleep a little. Yeah, Sylvia said. You, too. Jim patted her again, his long, squared-off fingers cupping Sylvias shoulder, which made her flinch. He turned to walk back to his seat, but Sylvia called after him by way of apology, though she wasnt quite sure if she was sorry. Its going to be fine, Dad. Well have a good time. Jim nodded at her, and began the slow trip back to his seat. When he was safely gone, Sylvia opened her notebook again and went back to the list shed been making: Things to Do Before College. So far, there were only four entries: 1. Buy extra-long sheets. 2. Fridge? 3. Get a tan. (Fake?) (Ha, kill me first.) (No, kill my parents.) 4. Lose virginity. Sylvia underlined the last item on the list and then drew some squiggles in the margin. That about covered it. *Revue de presse* "Delicious . . . richly riveting . . . The Vacationers offers all the delights of a fluffy, read-it-with-sunglasses-on-the-beach read, made substantial by the exceptional wit, insight, intelligence and talents of its author. People (four stars) Set down on the idyllic island of Majorca in the Mediterranean Sea, the Posts confront that universal complaint of vacationing families everywhere: There is nothing to do but get on one anothers nerves. Still, thats plenty of activity for Straub to spin one beguiling scene after another, exposing spots of annoyance slathered with sunscreen. Much of the comedy springs from the tension between being required to have the best time in the world and wanting to stab someone with an ice pick. . . . In these pages so funny, so wise and, yes, even so sweet shes created the best feel-good story of the summer. *The Washington Post* Emma Straub puts the fun back in dysfunction. *San Francisco Chronicle* Those who love novels featuring sly humor, sun-drenched islands, and family drama will fall fast and hard for this one. A nearly perfect read, beach or otherwise. *O, The Oprah Magazine* Theres nothing more addictive than a darkly funny dysfunctional domestic drama. Straubs novel set during a fraught family vacation in Mallorcas pretty much the perfect beach read. *Entertainment Weekly* For those unable to jet off to a Spanish island this summer, reading *The Vacationers* may be the next-best thing. . . . [A] gorgeously written novel . . . When I turned the last page, I felt as I often do when a vacation is over: grateful for the trip and mourning its end. *The New York Times* Book A psychologically astute comic novel. . . . Picturesque and filled with the solvable problems of the privileged, this is the kind of novel Franny or Sylvia might take on a trip to read poolside. Its good company. *The Boston Globe* "Emma Straubs bustling new novel is about a New York familys two-week idyll in a house on the Spanish island of Mallorca. Its also about a different kind of break: infidelity. . . . The storys women are so well drawn that they seem instantly familiar. . . . Witty." *The New York Times* "The Vacationers takes readers on an affecting, funny ride. *The Miami Herald* "Straub has a knack, reminiscent of Lorrie Moore, for writing beautiful prose about ordinary situations. . . . The Vacationers really is perfect summer reading: a beautifully written story thats neither too depressing nor too charming. *AV Club* [A] warm, witty story" *Good Housekeeping* Too compelling to leave your chaise lounge! *In Style* Full of Warmth and Wisdom . . . a frothy beach read. *NPR* Irresistible novel about simmering family tensions. *Town and Country* Funny, poignant, and beautifully observed. *Jojo Moyes*, author of *Me Before You*, via *Twitter* I would read anything Emma Straub writes. Shes a natural talent and a gorgeous and witty storyteller, who makes each sentence look not only easy, but perfectly real. I came to care so deeply about every single character in this great novel that I found myself unable to go to sleep at night until I was certain they had all landed safely. And they will linger with me, this richly imagined family, long into the future. *Elizabeth Gilbert* Witty, big-hearted, and packed with wisdom, this novel is a breezy read that sneaks in its emotional wallops and leaves you smiling for days. *Maria Semple*, author of *Where'd You Go, Bernadette* Charming and absorbing, this is a novel that demands to be read in long, satisfying gulps. *Maggie Shipstead*, author of *Seating Arrangements* "The Vacationers is a beautifully told story that walks the tightrope of family angst and connection with hilarity and truth. Get ready for the Post family drama, where the near empty nest collides with the dreams of the new generation. Emma Straub's writing is deft, clear and wise in ways that will surprise and delight you. Its a beyond the beach read. Its Ms. Straub at her dazzling best." *Adriana Trigiani*, author of *The Shoemakers Wife* Expertly observed offers such psychologically astute portrayals of the characters that it is hard not to feel fondly towards even their least appealing quirks. Its a delightful, breezy read in every way but one its a vacation thats hard to leave behind. *Elle* Did Emma Straub just get a little John Cheever-esque with her latest novel? Take the WASPy

family on vacation, with all their little underlying issues coming to the surface, combined with Straubs witty and colorful writing, and *The Vacationers* is the type of book just about anybody can read and enjoy. We guarantee this will be on every single list of summer beach reads come next month. Just you watch. Flavorwire Funny and tender . . . the perfect lighthearted beach read. Pop Sugar In *The Vacationers*, Emma Straub, a master observer of human emotion, once again dazzles her readers with this richly imagined travelogue, a fun, witty story about family relationships their evolution and strength. With its lush, scenic setting and its exciting cast of characters, *The Vacationers* is certain to be your newest beach accessory. Bustle Few writers can infuse a sentence with as much wit as Straub can. . . . A near-perfect high-brow summer novel. Grantland Emma Straub's second novel is funny and yet also surprisingly substantial. Christian Science Monitor Sharply observed and funny, Straub's domestic-drama-goes-abroad is a delightful study of the complexities of family and love, and the many distractions from both. Booklist (starred review) "A novel that is both a lot of fun to read and has plenty of insight into the marital bond and the human condition. Kirkus s (starred review) The pacing is quick but satisfying and the characters themselves feel genuinely complex, interesting, and knowledgeable. . . . A pleasant, readable journey. Publishers Weekly Straub's characters are suffused with humor and humanity, their relationships every bit as fragile and flawed but also resilient as we know to be true of real life. This novel is an utter delight and the perfect read for a sunny afternoon. It rings with truth and shines with the confidence of a writer hitting her stride. Book Riot Straub has created long lost friends through whom she explores the ways in which love cuts us and prompts us to grow throughout our lives. Bloggers Recommend