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The Little Friend



Par Donna Tartt
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Description : Description du produitThe hugely anticipated new novel by the author of *The Secret History*a best-seller nationwide and around the world, and one of the most astonishing debuts in recent times*The Little Friend* is even more transfixing and resonant.In a small Mississippi town, Harriet Cleve Dusfresnes grows up in the shadow of her brother, who when she was only a baby was found hanging dead from a black-tupelo tree in their yard. His killer was never identified, nor has his family, in the years since, recovered from the tragedy.For Harriet, who has grown up largely unsupervised, in a world of her own imagination, her brother is a link to a glorious past she has only heard stories about or glimpsed in photograph albums. Fiercely determined, precocious far beyond her twelve years, and steeped in the adventurous literature of Stevenson, Kipling, and Conan Doyle, she resolves, one summer, to solve the murder and exact her revenge. Harriets sole ally in this quest, her friend Hely, is devoted to her, but what they soon encounter has nothing

to do with child's play: it is dark, adult, and all too menacing. A revelation of familial longing and sorrow, *The Little Friend* explores crime and punishment, as well as the hidden complications and consequences that hinder the pursuit of truth and justice. A novel of breathtaking ambition and power, it is rich in moral paradox, insights into human frailty, and storytelling brilliance. From the Hardcover edition.

Presentation de l'auteur A beautiful new limited edition paperback of *The Little Friend*, published as part of the Bloomsbury Modern Classics list. The sunlit rails gleamed like dark mercury, arteries branching out silver from the switch points; the old telegraph poles were shaggy with kudzu and Virginia creeper and, above them, rose the water tower, its surface all washed out by the sun. Harriet, cautiously, stepped towards it in the weedy clearing. Around and around it she walked, around the rusted metal legs. One day is never, ever discussed by the Cleve family. The day that nine-year-old Robin was found hanging by the neck from a tree in their front garden. Twelve years later the family are no nearer to uncovering the truth of what happened to him. Inspired by Houdini and Robert Louis Stevenson, twelve-year-old Harriet sets out to find her brother's murderer and punish him. But what starts out as a child's game soon becomes a dangerous journey into the menacing underworld of a small Mississippi town. Extrait For the rest of her life, Charlotte Cleve would blame herself for her son's death because she had decided to have the Mothers Day dinner at six in the evening instead of noon, after church, which is when the Cleves usually had it. Dissatisfaction had been expressed by the elder Cleves at the new arrangement; and while this mainly had to do with suspicion of innovation, on principle, Charlotte felt that she should have paid attention to the undercurrent of grumbling, that it had been a slight but ominous warning of what was to come; a warning which, though obscure even in hindsight, was perhaps as good as any we can ever hope to receive in this life. Though the Cleves loved to recount among themselves even the minor events of their family history repeating word for word, with stylized narrative and rhetorical interruptions, entire death-bed scenes, or marriage proposals that had occurred a hundred years before the events of this terrible Mothers Day were never discussed. They were not discussed even in covert groups of two, brought together by a long car trip or by insomnia in a late-night kitchen; and this was unusual, because these family discussions were how the Cleves made sense of the world. Even the cruelest and most random disasters the death, by fire, of one of Charlottes infant cousins; the hunting accident in which Charlottes uncle had died while she was still in grammar school were constantly rehearsed among them, her grandmothers gentle voice and her mothers stern one merging harmoniously with her grandfathers baritone and the babble of her aunts, and certain ornamental bits, improvised by daring soloists, eagerly seized upon and elaborated by the chorus, until finally, by group effort, they arrived together at a single song; a song which was then memorized, and sung by the entire company again and again, which slowly eroded memory and came to take the place of truth: the angry fireman, failing in his efforts to resuscitate the tiny body, transmuted sweetly into a weeping one; the moping bird dog, puzzled for several weeks by her masters death, recast as the grief-stricken Queenie of family legend, who searched relentlessly for her beloved throughout the house and howled, inconsolable, in her pen all night; who barked in joyous welcome whenever the dear ghost approached in the yard, a ghost that only she could perceive. Dogs can see things that we cant, Charlottes aunt Tat always intoned, on cue, at the proper moment in the story. She was something of a mystic and the ghost was her innovation. But Robin: their dear little Robs. More than ten years later, his death remained an agony; there was no glossing any detail; its horror was not subject to repair or permutation by any of the narrative devices that the Cleves knew. And since this willful amnesia had kept Robins death from being translated into that sweet old family vernacular which smoothed even the bitterest mysteries into comfortable, comprehensible form the memory of that days events had a chaotic, fragmented quality, bright mirror-shards of nightmare which flared at the smell of wisteria, the creaking of a clothes-line, a certain stormy cast of spring light. From the Hardcover edition. From Publishers Weekly Widely anticipated over the decade since her debut in *The Secret History*, Tartt's second novel confirms her talent as a superb storyteller, sophisticated observer of human nature and keen appraiser of ethics and morality. If the theme of *The Secret History* was intellectual arrogance, here it is dangerous innocence. The death of nine-year-old Robin Cleve Dufresnes, found hanging from a tree in his own backyard in Alexandria, Miss., has never been solved. The crime destroyed his family: it turned his mother into a lethargic recluse; his father left town; and the surviving siblings, Allison and Harriet, are now, 12 years later-it is the early '70s-largely being raised by their black maid and a matriarchy of female relatives headed by their domineering grandmother and her three sisters. Although every character is sharply etched, 12-year-old Harriet-smart, stubborn, willful-is as vivid as a torchlight. Like many preadolescents, she's

fascinated by secrets. She vows to solve the mystery of her brother's death and unmask the killer, whom she decides, without a shred of evidence, is Danny Ratliff, a member of a degenerate, redneck family of hardened criminals. (The Ratliff brothers are good to their grandmother, however; their solicitude at times lends the novel the antic atmosphere of a Booth cartoon.) Harriet's pursuit of Danny, at first comic, gathers fateful impetus as she and her best friend, Hely, stalk the Ratliffs, and eventually, as the plot attains the suspense level of a thriller, leads her into mortal danger. Harriet learns about betrayal, guilt and loss, and crosses the threshold into an irrevocable knowledge of true evil. If Tartt wandered into melodrama in *The Secret History*, this time she's achieved perfect control over her material, melding suspense, character study and social background. Her knowledge of Southern ethos—the importance of family, of heritage, of race and class—is central to the plot, as is her take on Southerners' ability to construct a repertoire, veering toward mythology, of tales of the past. The double standard of justice in a racially segregated community is subtly reinforced, and while Tartt's portrait of the maid, Ida Rhew, evokes a stereotype, Tartt adds the dimension of bitter pride to Ida's character. In her first novel, Tartt unveiled a formidable intelligence. *The Little Friend* flowers with emotional insight, a gift for comedy and a sure sense of pacing. Wisely, this novel eschews a feel-good resolution. What it does provide is an immensely satisfying reading experience. Copyright 2002

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